# FREMONT

## THE WEST'S GREATEST ADVENTURER

ALLAN NEVINS

FREMONT in 1861

# FRÉMONT

THE WEST'S GREATEST ADVENTURER

*Being a Biography*
*from certain hitherto unpublished sources*

OF

GENERAL JOHN C. Charles FRÉMONT, 1813-1890

TOGETHER WITH HIS WIFE

Jessie (Benton) Frémont (Mrs. John Charles Frémont)

*and some account of the period of expansion*
*which found a brilliant leader*
*in The Pathfinder*

By ALLAN NEVINS, 1890-

IN TWO VOLUMES, VOLUME ONE

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# Preface

This is an attempt at an honest and impartial biography of a man who has been the subject of excessive laudation and excessive detraction. I have tried to base it throughout upon original sources, many of which have never previously been used. Though the aid given me by the Frémont family has been invaluable, this is in no sense a family biography; it was entirely planned and in great part written before I obtained the assistance of General Frémont's heirs, and all its main judgments had been independently formed. I have tried to attain strict accuracy in dealing with each phase of one of the strangest and most romantic careers in American history.

A complete acknowledgment of all the author's debts would be impossible. But I wish to record my gratitude to Major Frank P. Frémont, of Havana, Cuba; Mrs. J. C. Frémont, Jr., of Washington; Mrs. Henry Hull, of New York; the late Albert J. Beveridge; Mr. Nathaniel W. Stephenson; Mr. Frederick S. Dellenbaugh; Mr. William J. Ghent; Professor Evarts B. Greene of Columbia University; Mr. H. J. Eckenrode and Mrs. Mary Newton Stanard of Richmond, Va.; Mr. Charles Moore of the Library of Congress; Mr. Victor H. Paltsits of the New York Public Library; Professor J. H. Easterby and Mr. Oliver Warren of Charleston, S. C.; Professors Walter L. Fleming and

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*New York City, July 30, 1927.*

# Contents


| Chapter | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| | Preface | vii |
| I | A Richmond Elopement and a Charleston Boyhood | 1 |
| II | The Taste of Adventure | 19 |
| III | The Great West—First View | 29 |
| IV | The Meeting with Jessie | 45 |
| V | A Runaway Marriage | 60 |
| VI | The Stakes of the West | 76 |
| VII | The First Expedition: Preparation | 94 |
| VIII | To the South Pass and Frémont's Peak | 111 |
| IX | A Literary Achievement | 125 |
| X | The Second Expedition: A Family Mutiny | 138 |
| XI | West to Oregon: 1843 | 147 |
| XII | Over the Winter Sierras | 163 |
| XIII | Sutter's Fort and California | 181 |
| XIV | Homeward Over the Rockies | 198 |
| XV | A Dramatic Homecoming | 214 |
| XVI | War Clouds and the Third Expedition | 231 |
| XVII | The Clash with Castro | 251 |
| XVIII | The Recall to Action | 269 |
| XIX | The Bear Flag War | 287 |
| XX | The Marches of the California Battalion | 323 |
| XXI | A Letter from Jessie | 338 |

# Illustrations


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Frémont in 1861 | *Frontispiece* | |
| Joel R. Poinsett: Frémont's Patron | *Facing p.* | 20 |
| Steamboat Trapper of the Missouri River | " | 32 |
| Buffalo Escaping from a Prairie Fire | " | 40 |
| Thomas Hart Benton About 1840 | " | 52 |
| Frémont's Explorations, 1838-1853 | " | 62 |
| Fort Snelling in Minnesota | " | 78 |
| Astoria in Oregon, 1841 | " | 88 |
| Frémont the Explorer | " | 98 |
| Two Portraits of Kit Carson | " | 106 |
| St. Charles, Missouri | " | 120 |
| Frémont's Men Among the Buffalo | " | 130 |
| Two Pictures of Mrs. Frémont | " | 144 |
| Frémont's Expedition Breaking Camp at Dawn | " | 152 |
| Frémont's Second Expedition on Klamath Lake | " | 164 |
| Job's Peak of the Sierra Nevada in California | " | 174 |
| Three Portraits of Captain Sutter | " | 182 |
| Two Views of Sutter's Fort | " | 190 |
| Frémont's Men Following the Uncompahgre River | " | 210 |
| Fort Laramie | " | 240 |
| Frémont's Forest Camp Below Mt. Shasta | " | 270 |
| The Bear Flag and Bear Guidon | " | 306 |
| Frémont Raising the Bear Flag | " | 314 |
| Monterey Harbor in 1846 | " | 324 |
| Monterey in 1846 | " | 332 |

# FRÉMONT

## CHAPTER I

# A RICHMOND ELOPEMENT AND A CHARLESTON BOYHOOD

Our history begins in Richmond, Virginia, a vigorous, attractive town of 6,000 or 7,000 people, one-third of them negroes, another third artisans or shopkeepers, and the remainder people of gentility living in handsome brick houses on shady streets overlooking the James. In the years just preceding and following 1800 it was a town of distinguished men, where John Marshall and William Wirt practiced law, James Monroe served as Governor, and to which Jefferson paid an occasional visit. As the capital, it was the natural center of Virginia life. There was a well-established aristocracy, led by the Leighs, Ronalds, Amblers, and other patrician families; there were balls, theatrical performances, land and canal promoters, and angry sectional and political contests. Though the times and the place were strait-laced, there were also duels, intrigues, passionate courtships, and tragic love affairs. From one of the love affairs, stormy, illicit, and in the eyes of the period scandalous, came the union which gave John Charles Frémont his parentage.

In this Richmond, between Arch and Byrd Streets, there lived at the turn of the century Major John Pryor

and his wife. Mrs. Pryor, the future mother of Frémont, was an ardent and beautiful young woman, the picture of animation and energy. Her family was one of the best in Tidewater Virginia. She had been Ann Beverly Whiting, the youngest daughter of Colonel Thomas Whiting, a wealthy landowner of Gloucester County, a leading member of the House of Burgesses, and a civil officer of prominence during the Revolution. He was long since dead; she had been brought up by a married sister, and she had known poverty, for her stepfather, a man named Carey, had dissipated a good part of the fortune which her father had acquired. In part to escape this poverty, and in part to satisfy her sister and other relatives, in 1796, at the age of seventeen, she had married John Pryor.[1] It was a marriage of convenience, not one of love, for her husband was past sixty, gouty, stiff, and of decaying physical powers.

Yet John Pryor was a man of character and force, who had made himself well known not only in Richmond, but throughout much of the state. He had been an officer in the Revolution, and was later vice-president of the state Society of the Cincinnati. Every Virginian who traveled knew his large livery stable in the capital, where riders could have their horses "elegantly nicked for a guinea each," with "cropping and foxing in the latest styles," and "all manner of farriery."[2] Pryor had been secretary of the Jockey

[1] *Journal, House of Delegates, 1811–12*, p. 29.
[2] Mary N. Stanard, *Richmond, Its People and Its Story*, 55.

Club, was a good judge of horseflesh and a constant attendant at races, and had the reputation of a town wit. He owned a recreation park of almost two acres between Arch and Byrd and Seventh and Eighth Streets, called the Haymarket Garden; an attractive place, remote from the noise and dust of the town, with a view of the falls of the James, where people could buy ices, punch, cakes, and other refreshments. The major's house near by was a modest mansion built in a common Southern style, with living quarters in the center, two long wings, and smaller rooms at the extremity of these arms.[1]

Unfortunately for Major Pryor, about 1810 his discontented wife, long since tired of a husband old enough to be her grandfather, became acquainted with a handsome, dashing French *emigré* of the town named Charles Frémon. He was, we are told, a dark, slender man, with some pronounced foreign traits. His past had been full of adventure. Born in a village near Lyons, during the stormy days of the French Revolution he had taken passage on a French ship bound for Santo Domingo, where he hoped to find refuge with an aunt. His vessel was overtaken by a British cruiser and captured, the prize then being sailed to one of the British West Indies, and the passengers interned. There followed a protracted captivity for Charles Frémon; he supplemented his scanty prison allowance by making basketware, doing upholstering, and painting frescoes

[1] *Richmond Dispatch*, July 8, 1856.

upon the ceilings of houses belonging to well-to-do families. In time he escaped or was released, and arrived in Norfolk, Va., penniless, friendless, but undaunted. It was a period when the French were in high favor among the Virginia Republicans, and the people promptly took the refugee into their best circles.[1] Like many another Frenchman at the same period, he gave lessons in his native language for a livelihood. Finding Virginia agreeable, little by little he surrendered his first design of returning to France, and finally went to the state capital to join the noted scholar, Jefferson's friend, Louis Girardin.

We find Frémon teaching in Girardin's famous academy in 1809, in the capacity of assistant to the two heads, Girardin and David Doyle. It speaks well for him that he was employed by so reputable an establishment. But he seems to have been of irregular habits and strong will; later Doyle declared that he had lived in a house "on the Hill" with a woman not his wife, had defied his superiors when they protested, and in consequence had been summarily dismissed.[2] But he was popular in the town, and when John Wood became Girardin's partner, he was reëmployed, Wood remark-

[1] John Bigelow, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of John Charles Frémont*, 12. Both family tradition and family researches made in France support the view that the name was actually Frémont. But it is to be noted (1) that the patronymic Frémon is by no means unknown in France, and has been borne by men of distinction; (2) that his fellow-tenant Lataste, a Frenchman, spells the name Frémon in a sworn deposition; and (3) that Girardin, his careful and scholarly employer, spells it Frémon in repeated notices and advertisements in the Richmond Press.

[2] Letter in *Virginia Patriot*, Aug. 23, 1811.

ing that "the Richmond people do not care much about these things." It is probable that he moved in the best social circles, and it is certain that he soon knew Mrs. Pryor well, one story declaring that he was employed to teach her French.

Both were young, ardent, and lonely; they found each other congenial, and the result was inevitable. Mrs. Pryor had staying with her at the time a niece, Kitty Cowne, who was an interested and sympathetic observer of the attachment which sprung up between the pair. No doubt there were other observers in the little capital. One John Lataste has left a sworn deposition that he was intimate with Frémon when the latter lived as tenant in a small house of Major Pryor's at the Haymarket, that he often heard him speak of his intrigue with Mrs. Pryor, and that he said it was agreed between them that they were to be married in the event of Pryor's death.[1] Finally Major Pryor, with full reason, became suspicious of Frémon's intimacy with his wife.

Early in July, 1811, there was a sharp, explosive scene. In the presence of Frémon and of Kitty Cowne, the enraged major taxed Mrs. Pryor with flagrant misconduct, and even threatened to kill her. His wife drew herself up, blazing with anger, and told him: "You may spare yourself the crime. I shall leave your house tomorrow morning—forever!"[2] For his part, Frémon was hardly to be restrained, and in conversation with

[1] *Virginia State Library MSS. Dec. 3, 1811.*
[2] *John Bigelow MSS., Mrs. Mary Mead Burrill's statement.*

Lataste said that he would kill Pryor or anybody else who tried now to interfere with their elopement or to maltreat Mrs. Pryor on his account. On the morning of July 10 the two left town together in the Williamsburg stage, Mrs. Pryor taking her baggage and two negro slaves. Kitty Cowne's father came to take her away; the major was left alone, and the town rang with the scandal, which almost disrupted poor Girardin's school.

Such an elopement, natural and even justifiable though it seems to our modern view, constituted in those days an offence too grave for Virginia society to forget or forgive, and Mrs. Pryor and Frémon had no wish to tarry in Williamsburg or Norfolk longer than was necessary to enable her to gather together what property she possessed. At the first opportunity they set out southward. Family tradition, as given to John Bigelow almost a half century later, stated that their joint capital was sufficient to gratify the wish of Frémon to view the South and learn something of the habits of the Indians, in which he was keenly interested—that they took their own horses, carriage, and servants, and began a quasi-scientific tour. This may be true, for Mrs. Pryor had inherited just a year previously from her father's estate, long tied up in litigation, slaves valued at $2,400,[1] and possibly had other means. But the story seems doubtful. The probability is that Frémon moved from town to town finding work as a fresco painter, upholsterer, or teacher of French, and seeking a permanent residence.

[1] *Records, Richmond Superior Court of Chancery, June 13, 1810.*

Family tradition, as recorded by Bigelow, also tells us that the legislature of Virginia promptly sanctioned the separation of Major Pryor and his wife by passing an act of divorce, and that the two were soon married again, Mrs. Pryor to Mr. Frémon and the major to his housekeeper. This account it is impossible to verify, and in certain respects it is plainly inaccurate. The petition of Major Pryor for a divorce was denied by the legislature on Dec. 11, 1811.[1] A search of the subsequent legislative proceedings fails to reveal any record of unfavorable action, and divorce was of course then impossible in Virginia without legislative approval. Certainly none has been granted when on January 21, 1813, the boy named John Charles Frémon(t) was born in Savannah, Ga., whither Frémon and Mrs. Pryor had traveled by way of Charleston. He was, in a narrowly legal view, of illegitimate birth.

A few months later, according to more trustworthy chronicles, the orbit of the infant Frémont impinged momentarily upon that of the man with whose later career his own was to be so closely bound, Thomas Hart Benton. The parents, fearing the hot season, had traveled north with the baby. They were staying at a great rambling inn at Nashville, Tenn., when on Sept. 4, 1813, they were witnesses of a notable event. Among their fellow guests were Benton, then a fiery young frontier colonel, lawyer, and legislator of Tennessee, and his brother, Jesse Benton. Suddenly there arrived upon the

[1] *Legislative Journal.*

scene no less a personage than Gen. Andrew Jackson, with the laurels of his march from Natchez to Nashville fresh upon him; hot-tempered, making the inn ring with his commands, and receiving the cheers of Nashville townspeople as his rightful due. A feud had for some time been smoldering between Jackson and the two Bentons. It had originated in a trifle—Jackson had acted as opposing second in a duel in which Jesse Benton participated, and when Benton had learned this, he had abused Jackson angrily. The future hero of New Orleans had sworn to horsewhip Benton on sight. An encounter now occurred which might have been tragic, but was only ludicrous. Blows and shots were exchanged; Jackson was carried away with a pistol ball through his shoulder; Benton was pitched headlong down a flight of stairs, and the other combatants were more or less seriously injured.[1] The parents of Frémont heard the uproar, and it is said that some of the bullets passed through their room. They were doubtless used to seeing or hearing such affrays.

Five years later the *emigré* Frémon or Frémont was dead, and the family, now comprising three children in all, were left in straitened circumstances in Norfolk. His elder brother, Francis Frémont, who resided there, was on the point of returning to his native land with his family, and he proposed that Mrs. Frémont accompany him. She would hear nothing of such an exile,

[1] William Graham Sumner, *Andrew Jackson as a Public Man*, 31; Theodore Roosevelt, *Life of Thomas Hart Benton*, 28; John Bigelow, *Frémont*, 22.

for she was resolved to remain an American. Left to herself, she lived for a time at Dinwiddie Court-House, where young John Charles—called "Charley"—received his first instruction; then, with an income too pinched to make life among her old neighbors comfortable, she removed to Charleston.[1] Here, in the course of a few years, the infant daughter died, leaving only the two sons.

Our first real glimpse of John Charles Frémont is thus caught as a schoolboy in the old town on the banks of the Ashley and Cooper; a town of fewer than 20,000 people, but of considerable wealth, culture, and social animation. It was an admirable place to rear a lively, impressionable lad. The French Huguenot families made him feel his French blood an advantage, not a liability. There was much to enjoy in the life. Stately residences stretched away from the outskirts of the town —Drayton Hall, Middleton Place, Greenfield, Hampton, the Elms, and others; a bustling commercial activity, largely in the hands of foreigners, kept the business district active. Every May the planters of the lowlands, fleeing the pestilential heat of their inland estates, came to town to enjoy its sea breezes. They returned home when the first frost fell in November, killing the malaria, but they were back again in town shortly after Christmas—by the end of January. This was the "gay season," beloved of young girls in especial. It included the concerts and balls of the St. Cecilia

[1] Bigelow, *Frémont*, 23.

Society; the dancing assemblies, the Philharmonic concerts, the races, and the Jockey Ball. Race week was a carnival period, when planters thronged to town, the traders stopped their business to enjoy the fête, and every man laid bets, talked horses, and drank. The Carolinians were noted for their hospitality, extravagance, and hot-headed punctilios and duels. Negroes abounded, for it was a poor planter or merchant who did not keep a half dozen servants in attendance upon his stables, table, and household; their merry chatter filled the streets, and their songs echoed from the wharves, covered with West Indian products—barrels of molasses, coffee bags, cocoanuts, and bananas, with rice and cotton for export. Those who wished vice could find plenty of it here; those who wished refinement could find a really intellectual society of the old-fashioned kind, for the old families—the Rutledges, Haynes, Pinckneys (Gen. Charles Pinckney was one of the surviving Revolutionary veterans), Hugers, Middletons, and others—prided themselves on their elegance and accomplishments.

Young Frémont was the son of a poor widow, a still poorer *emigré;* but in this town of sharply drawn class lines he moved in the best circles. The South Carolinians knew the claims of the Whiting family of Virginia to social distinction; they knew that Mrs. Frémont's line was allied with Washington's; and they probably sympathized with her tragic elopement. The Revolution had made only too many of the best Charles-

tonians poverty-stricken themselves. Mrs. Frémont was a member of St. Philip's Church,[1] where her children were confirmed along with the most aristocratic youngsters of the city. Moreover, the boy Frémont quickly made friends on his own account.

He grew up wonderfully agile and quick of body, active of mind, and, with his dark hair, olive skin, and snapping eyes, a very handsome lad. There was no more attractive youngster in Charleston than "Charley" Frémont. Everyone befriended him. His mother, hoping that he could learn a profession and earn a living at the same time, accepted the offer of John W. Mitchell, one of the lights of the South Carolina bar, to give him a place in his law office. Mitchell was struck by the boy's alert mind, his taste for good literature, and his combination of instinctive refinement and fervor of temperament. The lad was fitted to make an ornament of the pulpit, he decided. Young Frémont had, and kept through life, a decided religious tendency, and this contributed to the decision. In pursuance of the idea, Mitchell sent John Charles at fourteen—that is, in 1827—to a preparatory school kept by Dr. John Roberton, a Scotchman who had been educated at Edinburgh University, and who specialized in the preparation of boys for Charleston College. Years later Roberton remembered the impression Frémont had produced upon him when he entered.[2] He was a youth of "middle size,

[1] H. W. Beecher, in *New York Tribune*, July 4, 1856.
[2] John Roberton, *Anabasis*, Introduction.

graceful in manners, rather slender, but well formed, and upon the whole what I should call handsome; of a keen piercing eye and a noble forehead, seemingly the very seat of genius." It was a happy chance, contributing greatly to Frémont's intellectual growth, that he was thrown into contact with such a man.

In this school the boy's quickness of apprehension was first exhibited, and the rapidity of his progress astonished his teacher. When he entered, he knew the mere rudiments of Latin; Roberton undertook to instruct him in Greek, Latin, and mathematics to a point where he could matriculate at the college.[1] He seemed, as Roberton said later, to master the ancient languages by intuition. In no time he was at the head of the class in Cæsar, while he soon excelled in Greek. Within a year he had read Cæsar, Nepos, Sallust, Horace, half of Virgil, two books of Livy, and four books of Homer's Iliad. "Whatsoever he read," says Roberton, "he retained." Perhaps the retention was not permanent, for there is little evidence in Frémont's writings of classical culture, or in his busy later life of a taste for classical studies; but it is certain that the novelty and breadth of the ancient literatures, and the keen interest Roberton took in urging him forward, inspired his mind.

Frémont's aptitude was such that at the end of little more than a year of study, when he was sixteen, he was able to enter Charleston College in the junior class. His work began on or about the first of May, 1829, that

[1] Bigelow, *Frémont*, 24.

being the commencement of the collegiate term. He was well advanced in mathematics; he loved to pore over his teacher's volumes of the Greek dramatists in their beautiful Edinburgh print;[1] he seemed, in short, the pattern of an enthusiastic scholar. In this devotion to study appeared the zest and curiosity of the future explorer. Greek especially, he said later, "had a mysterious charm, as if behind the strange characters belonging to an ancient world I was to find things of wonderful interest." Roberton had a feeling that it was love of novelty and intellectual inquisitiveness, rather than any more sober devotion, which inspired him. "When I contemplated his bold, fearless disposition," he says, "his powerful inventive genius, his admiration of warlike exploits, and his love of heroic and adventurous deeds, I did not think it likely he would be a minister of the gospel." His classmates remarked that he was taciturn and reserved, but of brilliant mind, especially in mathematics.[2] The lad soon gave evidence that allied with his brilliancy were qualities of restlessness, instability, and rashness.

For some months "Charley" Frémont applied himself to his books. At the beginning of 1830 he was given permission to absent himself, and go to the country to teach, probably in the household of some planter needing a tutor. He remained absent until the beginning of April, when he returned and after some delay—his books not having arrived with him—resumed his

[1] John Charles Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 19.
[2] *Charleston News and Courier*, July 15, 1890.

studies.[1] For a time after this interruption all continued to go well. He held a high place among his classmates in the "Scientific Department," who numbered some scions of leading Charleston families, such as C. C. Pinckney, J. Hamilton Prioleau, John Porcher, and Nelson Mitchell. But Frémont was a little spoiled. He learned too easily, and yielded too easily to his love of pleasure and excitement. We have to remember the strange mixture of blood which flowed in his veins; his descent from a Frenchman who was born a wanderer, and who roved restlessly from place to place till the end of his days; and the fact that he come into the world in some inn or boarding house, was suckled in a carriage traversing the endless muddy Southern roads, was surrounded in his infancy by a changing panorama of the frontier, and knew no settled home till he was well past school age. His school-teaching sojourn in the country had aroused an innate love of outdoor life which was fierce in its intensity. We may conjecture that his mother, burdened with the cares of a poor widow trying to keep her home together, was unable to control the high-spirited lad.

It is remarkable how closely the fragments of young Frémont's personal history which have survived through his own *Memoirs* or the recollections of others fit the pattern of his personality and tastes as they were exhibited in later years. At sixteen his salient traits—ardor, imagination, ambition, quickness, endurance, and

[1] *MS. Faculty Journal*, weekly record.

reckless impetuosity—were well established. It was sheer impetuosity—the impetuosity of a boy immersed in a calf-love affair—which made him drop his books and his higher aims. He was learning subjects that were to be of the greatest value in later years: mathematics, botany, and the elements of physics and chemistry. He had won the warm regard, not only of leading lawyers like Mitchell, but of the rector of St. Philip's, the Reverend (later Bishop) Christopher Gadsden, who had given him assistance. But he began to absent himself at frequent intervals from college; and when he did come to his classes, he was not prepared for them. He was, so he fancied, passionately in love.

For three years he had been intimate with a Creole family which had escaped the Santo Domingo massacres in the dreadful uprising of the natives under Toussaint l'Ouverture and Dessalines and taken refuge in Charleston. Like himself, they spoke French. Of the five children, three girls and two boys, the eldest daughter was named Cecilia; an unusually handsome girl, with clear ruddy skin, large dark eyes, and flowing blue-black hair. With the two boys, young Frémont ranged the woods behind the town, still wild and tangled, or took a sailboat down the bay to the historic islands, where they hunted or fished, or went over the bar and far out to sea. Sometimes, when the breeze failed and they went dangerously near the breakers pounding upon the bar, they had the joy—always keen to Frémont—of physical peril. "I remember, as in a picture," he wrote

nearly a half-century afterward, "seeing the beads of perspiration on the forehead of my friend Henry as he tugged frantically at his oar when we had found ourselves one day on Drunken Dick, a huge breaker that to our eyes appeared monstrous as he flung his spray close to the boat. For us it was really pull Dick, pull Devil. Those were the splendid outside days." [1] But his chief preoccupation was with Cecilia. To be with her on some outdoor excursion was the acme of happiness. School was forgotten. In after years he sighed over the recollection of these days of pure pleasure—"days of unreflecting life when I lived in the glow of a passion that now I know extended its refining influence over my whole life." [2]

It was characteristic of young Frémont, again, that he took the consequences of his rashness with gay *insouciance*. He was given formal warning by mild Dr. Adams, the head of the college. But he persisted in staying away for days until, on February 5, 1831, within a few months of his graduation, he was dismissed for "habitual irregularity and incorrigible negligence." [3] Under the spell of his love affair, he cared nothing for the supposed disgrace. The college authorities lectured him sternly upon the disappointment of his friends and the pity of his broken career. But Frémont was living in a charmed atmosphere, and their edict only set him free for a fuller enjoyment of his days in the open and

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 20.
[2] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 20, 21.
[3] *MS. Faculty Journal*, Feb. 5, 1831.

his evenings of play with Cecilia and her brothers, which were often prolonged to so late an hour as to arouse the ire of her tall, stern, gray-haired grandmother, who broke out in a torrent of French rebuke. "I smiled to myself," wrote Frémont later of the expulsion. He took no thought for the harvest, but "gathered the corn-flower from the upspringing grain." But after a time Cecilia began to pall upon him; the rebukes of his elders made an impression, and his ambition reasserted itself.

It was necessary, moreover, for him to earn his bread and contribute to his mother's support. Fortunately, the fact that he had been so near to graduation, and his reputation for brilliancy, enabled him to escape the worst consequences of expulsion. He was still in demand as a teacher. In this capacity he served for a time in the "Apprentices' Library"—a collection of books with some instructional facilities—and in a private school kept by John A. Wotten. While teaching, he read in desultory but profitable fashion, and long afterward he recalled gratefully two books, one a chronicle of men who had distinguished themselves by noble deeds, or rendered themselves infamous by base acts, and the other a Dutch work on practical astronomy. The beautiful maps of the constellations, and the careful tables of astronomical calculations, fascinated him and laid the foundations for his later familiarity with the heavens.[1]

Thus closed the first phase of Frémont's preparation

[1] *Charleston Courier*, Oct. 27, 1856; Frémont, *Memoirs*, 21. By special action of the college authorities, Frémont was given the degree of B. A. on March 19, 1836; *Minutes of The Board of Trustees*, p. 263.

—a happier preparation than it seemed at the time—for life. The second phase, now about to begin, was noteworthy chiefly in two respects; in that it threw Frémont into contact with distinguished men, who were able to give him powerful assistance, and in that, at the same time, it tended to strengthen his already marked nomadic tendencies.

## CHAPTER II

## THE TASTE OF ADVENTURE

THE true beginning of Frémont's career dates from his acquaintanceship with one of the most eminent citizens of Charleston, Joel R. Poinsett, who had been our minister to Mexico from 1825 to 1829. All Frémont's distinction was won in government service, and it was Poinsett, a Democrat and Unionist, who launched him upon his future course.

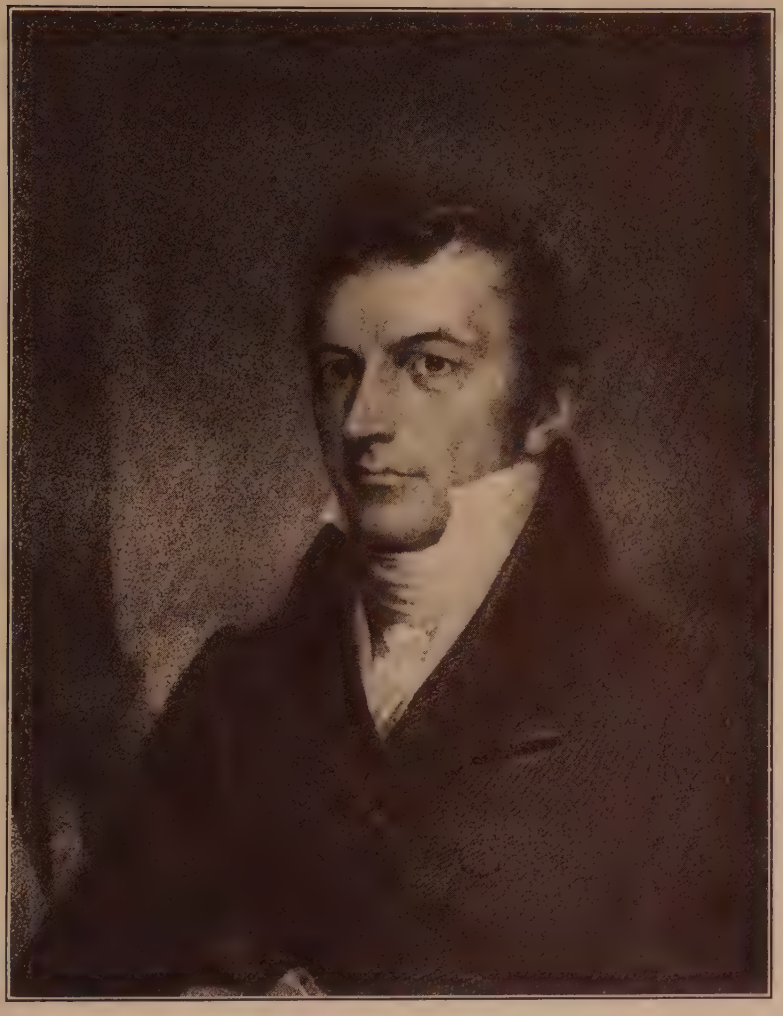
Poinsett is now so nearly forgotten that only the flower poinsettia, which he gave to botany, keeps his name alive. Yet in his day he was a distinguished servant of the Republic; a vigorous representative in Mexico during a stormy period, an able member of Congress, a very capable secretary of war. He was still more —he was a man of culture and social leadership. Few Americans of his time had seen more of the varied activities of the world.

One reason for his influence upon Frémont lay in the fact that he had traveled widely and was a thorough man of the world. Born of a wealthy Huguenot family, Poinsett trained himself first in medicine and later in the law. Though his health was permanently injured by his studies, he was one of the numerous invalids whose ailments stimulate them to increased activity; and

in his old age he was wont to say that despite the doctors, he had lived strenuously with one lung for sixty years. As a young man he traveled all over Europe, visited the leading capitals, entered the best society, was given marks of favor in St. Petersburg by Czar Alexander I, and even penetrated the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, where he was entertained by the reigning khans. Service as the American minister to Chile was followed by his mission to Mexico, where he found the country in the throes of disorder, with one insurrection following another in rapid succession, and where he acted sternly to assert American rights.

Frémont could have found no better friend than this cultivated gentleman, whose breakfasts were a feature of Charleston social life. Once weekly he was accustomed to collect at his table the most charming women and the most intelligent men he could find. Ex-President Monroe was a guest at one of these breakfasts during his visit to Charleston in 1826. The imagination of young Frémont, sitting at Poinsett's board, was kindled by the recital of his wanderings and adventures. Poinsett, attracted for his part by the vivacity and handsome person of the lad, learned that Frémont was eager to see the world, and would like nothing better than a naval or military appointment.

To this intercourse with Poinsett we may in part trace one fact in Frémont's career: the fact that, born a Southerner, bred and schooled a Southerner, he was throughout life warmly attached to the Union and free



JOEL R. POINSETT: FRÉMONT'S PATRON

(Born 1779; Representative in Congress under Monroe; Minister to Mexico under J. Q. Adams; Secretary of War under Van Buren; died 1851. Portrait by J. B. Longacre.)

from Southern prejudices. Poinsett was a leader among the Union men of South Carolina, and the trusted lieutenant of President Jackson in his contest with that state. It was by virtue of this position that, in the grimmest crisis which came to South Carolina between the Revolution and the Civil War, he found himself able to satisfy the boy's love of adventure. While Frémont was quietly teaching school in November, 1832, a great state convention passed a nullification ordinance aimed at the tariff act; President Jackson in December answered it with a ringing proclamation; that same month he sent the sloop of war *Natchez* to Charleston Harbor, and in January he ordered General Winfield Scott to Charleston to halt, by force of arms, any attempt to seize the forts. Intense excitement reigned in the proud little capital. For a time the outbreak of war between the state and the Federal Government seemed imminent. The *Natchez* was expected to sustain the national authority even at the cost of bombarding the town. Fortunately, those who counseled a compromise prevailed, and in the middle of March, when the nullification ordinance was rescinded, the storm blew over.[1] The visit of the *Natchez,* which had sighted its guns and taken precautions against fire ships, ended in a round of balls and other social courtesies. In April, 1833, the vessel returned to Hampton Roads; and in May it sailed on a cruise to South America. With it went young Frémont, just twenty years old, in the

[1] Claude G. Bowers, *Party Battles of the Jackson Period,* 254 ff.; 268 ff.; 285.

capacity of a teacher of mathematics. He had obtained his appointment through Poinsett, who thoroughly disapproved of his entry into the Navy, but who was glad to see him seek a larger sphere than he could find in Charleston.

Though this naval interlude answered to, and strengthened, Frémont's love of wandering, later in life he had reason to look back upon it with some regret. It was on the whole a tedious cruise, and taught him little that was useful. Yet the voyage did offer some advantages.

One of these advantages was association with David Farragut, who was lieutenant or executive officer of the ship; a man still in his early thirties, though a veteran of the War of 1812, in which a vessel on which he was acting as midshipman, the *Essex,* had been captured by the British.[1] Another was the opportunity of viewing the principal ports of South America at a juncture of special interest. They touched at Buenos Aires, where the tyrant Rosas was in control of the best part of the Argentine, ruling with a steel grip. At Rio de Janeiro, Frémont and another youth were instrumental in preventing bloodshed in a senseless duel. Two young officers of the ship, a South Carolinian and a New Englander, had quarreled, exchanged challenges, and selected Frémont and this other youth as seconds. The seconds held a conference and agreed that they would take pistols and charge them with powder only; but that

[1] Alfred T. Mahan, *Life of Admiral Farragut,* 75.

if a second fire were insisted upon, they would then load them with ball. The officers were rowed ashore, took their stand at a distance of twelve paces, and fired point-blank. Both looked surprised and relieved when they found themselves unscratched. Thereupon the seconds hurried up, and asserting that the quarrel was not grave enough to justify another shot, declared the affair closed. It was a characteristic exhibition of Frémont's humanity.

Fortunately the young man resisted the temptation, soon presented in a dangerous form, to make his connection with the Navy permanent. Congress had provided for the establishment of professorships of mathematics in the Navy, and Frémont, applying at Norfolk for such a post, successfully passed the examination. But the appointment was no sooner in his hands than he declined it. He had been offered an opportunity to help survey the route of a projected railroad between Charleston and Cincinnati, the work to be under the charge of Captain W. S. Williams of the United States Topographical Corps. He was tired of ship life; Poinsett doubtless urged him to take the place, and he accepted. He had moved one long step nearer the field in which he was to achieve his fame.

We can imagine the zest with which Frémont, to whom the wild scenes of nature were always a passion, exchanged the monotony of a warship for the wilderness and the mountain range. His immediate superior was a West Point graduate named White, who knew how to

make the labors of their little party, one of several detachments engaged in running trial lines, agreeable. When they penetrated the mountains of the Carolinas in the bright autumn weather of 1837, they found the air cool and invigorating, the water abundant, and the scenery beautiful. Sometimes they stopped for the night at village inns, but more frequently at farmhouses. "The survey," says Frémont, "was a kind of picnic, with work enough to give it zest, and we were all sorry when it was over." [1]

If we may believe some rather ill-natured gossip used by his political opponents in 1856, scenery and picnicking were not the sole attractions of the summer. He spent a great part of several months in Greenville, South Carolina, boarding at the Mansion House. According to prominent citizens of the town, he was "a gay, buxom chap," with a taste for society. "He became acquainted with a very pretty girl, in moderate circumstances," one of them later wrote; "and, as she lived in front of the house I occupied, I had every opportunity of seeing the *love* exhibited by the couple, on very many occasions. He was engaged to her, and deserted her without a cause, and the family were very much distressed about the matter. I have witnessed the intimacy myself, and the facts are notorious in our town at this time." [2] The writer adds that Frémont's mother, who had now remarried and was known as Mrs. Hale, once subsequently

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 24.
[2] *Charleston Courier*, Oct. 27, 1856.

spent a summer in Greenville, and was deeply disturbed by the manner in which her son had treated the girl. The editor of the Greenville *Patriot and Mountaineer* in 1856 makes the corroborative statement that Frémont "became engaged to a young lady here, and we understand that the time was appointed for their wedding, and he proved false to his plighted faith." Apparently the girl's heart was not broken, for in time she married. The episode harmonizes with what we know of Frémont's love affair with Cecilia in Charleston, and of the ardor of his later courtship of Jessie Benton in Washington, and if not to his credit, shows only that he was impetuous in matters of the heart as in everything else.

Frémont regretted leaving his outdoor days so much that he looked about for similar employment; and an unexpected chance presented itself, a chance which took him another pace nearer his true vocation of explorer. President Jackson, in pushing forward the Federal policy of transferring all the Indian tribes beyond the Mississippi, was about to remove the Cherokees from their lands in Georgia. The Cherokees naturally opposed the measure, and hostilities were threatened. For military purposes if the war broke out, and for facilitating the distribution of lands if it did not, the Government needed a rough survey of the region. Captain Williams, having finished the Cincinnati-Charleston work, was ordered to make a military reconnaissance, and he chose Frémont as one of his assistants.

It had to be a winter survey (1837-38), carried out hastily in the mountainous country of the Cherokees, in the face of numerous obstacles and hardships. To a young man of sedentary tastes or a soft streak, it would have been intolerable. To Frémont, it was endlessly fascinating. The little party was split into a number of squads assigned to separate tasks. Sometimes Frémont would be sent out with a single guide to make a sketch of some stream or mountain spur; sometimes he would accompany a half-dozen companions sent, with pack mules carrying their tents and food, to map a more inhabited part of the district. It was a well-forested region, with Indian farms scattered in the fertile, level valleys. The rangers could, if lucky, halt at night at some Indian cabin; if they found themselves in the woods, they could set up their half-faced tents, build great fires of hickory logs, and roast the choicest parts of one of the numerous wild hogs found fattening on forest mast. Frémont learned how to pack a motley assortment of provisions, cooking utensils, and bedding on mule back in a fashion to resist steep trails and brushing limbs; he learned to make an appetizing meal from a little flour, water, and raw meat; he learned to pitch a tent in a snowdrift, with an icy wind blinding him with sleet. A hundred lessons of woodcraft became second nature to him. The joy of going to sleep by a glowing fire, with the wind singing in the pines and the whippoorwills making the hills echo, entered his blood. He had, as he wrote long afterwards, come to himself:[1]

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 25.

> Here I found the path which I was destined to walk. Through many years to come the occupation of my life was to be among Indians and in waste places. There were to be no more years wasted in tentative efforts to find a way for myself. The work was laid out and it began here with a remarkable continuity of purpose.

Another element of delight was the opportunity of studying the semi-civilized Indians of the country. Some of them exhibited a high degree of culture. In making a reconnaissance of the Hiwassee River, he stopped at a log house which, built by an Indian of carefully smoothed logs, with glass panes, was a handsome example of forest architecture. It stood on a high bank overlooking the picturesque stream, with the cornfields in the bottom land just below. Many other farms were precisely the same as those to be found everywhere along the frontier; while, in their villages, the Cherokees lived simply and comfortably. But there was a comparatively small element among the tribes, as Frémont noted, which had been corrupted by the proximity of rough whites. He sometimes visited Indian feasts which broke up, when the Cherokees became mad with drink, in furious disorder; he saw them end in bloody frays, the braves slashing each other with knives. Reaching one Cherokee camp at a time of carouse, he had to sleep in a corn crib. The next morning he bathed in the Nantahéylè River: "There was ice along the banks and

the water in my hair froze into fretful quills." It is noteworthy that while Frémont speaks with admiration of the courage and the indifference to pain shown by the Cherokees, he seems to have had no real liking for them; and that he refers to their expulsion, one of the most shameful acts of the Jackson Administration, as a measure beneficial both to the Indians and the whites.[1]

All too soon the Cherokee survey ended. Frémont returned to Charleston to see his mother, now left alone, and to revisit old scenes and friends. He was twenty-five, and in full manly strength, tanned, lithe, and hardy. His whole life—his infancy on the frontier, his scientific education, his knowledge of mathematics and surveying, his intimacy with sea and wilderness, his lore of the woods—had constituted an ideal preparation for the career which was now to open before him. While he was casting about for work, his friend Poinsett, now secretary of war under Van Buren, took a step in his behalf which meant much more than simply further surveying.

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 24, 25.

## CHAPTER III

## THE GREAT WEST—FIRST VIEW

SECRETARY POINSETT, knowing what Frémont desired, had him commissioned a second lieutenant in the Topographical Corps, and ordered him to Washington. The young man arrived in the capital at an auspicious moment. A new western survey had been determined upon, an examination of the wide plateau country between the upper Mississippi and Missouri Rivers; and a distinguished foreigner, Jean Nicholas Nicollet, had been chosen to conduct it. Poinsett planned to include his protégé in the expedition. When Frémont heard of his assignment, he was exuberantly elated. The flat, frowsy little capital had within a few days become a hateful place to him. He had no friends; there were no amusements beyond watching the alternate reign of mud and dust along the single important street, Pennsylvania Avenue; and the ugliness of the surrounding country weighed upon his spirits. His body was so inured to constant exercise that a routine of streets, offices, and boarding houses affected him with a physical *malaise*. To be sent to the romantic West, the land of Indians, buffaloes, and stupendous natural wonders, was an incredible bit of luck. He went for-

ward at once to St. Louis, making the trip by stage over the Alleghenies and by steamboat down the Ohio and up the Mississippi.[1]

Nicollet, thus introduced to Frémont by Secretary Poinsett, was a remarkable figure, and just the leader to appeal to Frémont. Then fifty-two years old, he was in the prime of life. He was a scientist—a member of the French Academy of Sciences and of the Legion of Honor, a man who had stood high in the circle of Arago and other savants. He was also a patriot, whose imagination had been touched by the exploits of La Salle and Champlain, and who wished to rescue from oblivion the record of French explorations in the West. With his Parisian background, he was a polished gentleman, urbane, thoughtful of others, and persuasive; while the list of his accomplishments ranged from higher mathematics to music. His past gave him a romantic interest. He had held a considerable fortune in France, had lost it in speculation, and had fled from the painful scenes of his ruin. Reaching New Orleans in 1832, a stranger, with limited funds, he had lived for a time chiefly in the Southwest, where his investigations had brought him to the notice of army officers as well as to that of Franco-American society. In the spring of 1835, he had set out on a tour to the upper Mississippi, with the intention of exploring the river and determining its sources with astronomical accuracy. His chief supporter in this venture had been the rich fur house of Chouteau and

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 30, 31.

Company, in St. Louis, which wished more general information regarding the Indian country thereabouts. The War Department furnished him letters to the army officers and Indian agents on the frontier, and lent him some scientific instruments, but did no more. In 1838, with funds exhausted and health seriously impaired by his hardships, Nicollet was back in civilization, taking up his residence in Baltimore; but he had accomplished a notable feat of exploration. He had visited Lake Itasca, and traced its principal affluent, now known as Nicollet's Infant Mississippi, several miles to the southwest. Not for fifty years was any scientific knowledge of importance regarding the Mississippi added to that which he brought back. Inevitably, Nicollet's work attracted the attention of Secretary Poinsett.[1]

It was natural for Nicollet, with his reputation, his polished bearing, and his high purposes, to make friends wherever he went, and particularly in the French-Catholic circles of such cities as New Orleans, Baltimore, and St. Louis. For Frémont to be associated with such a man was trebly a piece of good fortune. He learned from him far more practical science than the schools could have taught him in years; he was brought into contact with the best society of several cities; and his name was associated with an expedition upon which the eyes of everyone interested in Western development were fixed.

At St. Louis, there was a leisurely and pleasant inter-

[1] *Minnesota Historical Collections*, I, 183 ff.

lude while the party was outfitting itself. Not only did Frémont make friends among the military men—among them Robert E. Lee, a captain in the engineering corps, just then busy with Mississippi improvements, whose handsome bearing and helpfulness made an enduring impression upon him—but he was taken by Nicollet among the old French residents. A profuse hospitality was customary in these circles. Every evening they were asked to dinner or to some entertainment, a reception or ball, while Frémont frequently accompanied Nicollet, who was intimate with the clergy, to agreeable suppers in the refectory of the Catholic cathedral. Meanwhile the house of Chouteau was equipping the expedition, procuring both the stores and the men, who, for the most part, were voyageurs in its own employ. We may be sure that the lieutenant was intensely interested in the strange new scenes about him—in the turbid, yellow flood of the Mississippi, rolling past the town, with flatboats, rafts, and keelboats dotting the waters, and an occasional steamboat, pouring smoke from two high pipes above its light hull; in the lazy, grunting Indians, hugging the shade on hot summer afternoons; in the leather-garbed trappers, ready to pour their stories of adventure into his ear in rough French.

The sense of wonder and elation accompanied the ardent young man throughout the summer expedition of 1838, with its survey of a long strip westward from the Mississippi headwaters.

He immensely enjoyed the voyage up the river to

STEAMBOAT "TRAPPER" OF THE MISSOURI RIVER

Typical of the river steamboats of the late thirties. From the Collections of the Kansas Historical Society, Vol. IX.

the mouth of the Minnesota, where Henry Sibley commanded a whole province of the American Fur Company. Sibley, in fact, was a partner in the company; he had a long line of posts under his charge—one at Lac Traverse, one at Lac qui Parle, one at Traverse des Sioux, one at Little Rapids, one at Coteau des Prairies, and one on Cannon River; he furnished them with goods, and in return received furs drawn from the Minnesota, Dakota, and Manitoba country.[1] Near at hand was a small settlement of whites, a Sioux village, and, on the high bluff between the Minnesota and the Mississippi, the white walls of Fort Snelling. With Sibley, a tall, athletic young man of about Frémont's own age, the lieutenant spent many profitable hours. Sibley had been trained for the law in Michigan, but had found his career in the rough West. His remarkable work as lawmaker and administrator lay all before him, and at the moment he was living the life of a bachelor frontiersman, engrossed in trade and adventure. His house was a hunting lodge, filled with Irish wolfhounds and other dogs, and guns, and he was fond of going on long hunting excursions. His influence over the Indians, who admired his prowess with the rifle, his fine frame, and his decision, was astonishing, and taught Frémont several lessons.[2] While the expedition refitted here, the young explorer fraternized with him; wandered about the fort, admired the beauty of a Sioux girl who made such an

[1] W. P. Shortridge, *Transition of a Typical Frontier*, 15 ff.
[2] Folwell, *Minnesota*, I, 161 ff.; Nathaniel West, *Life of H. H. Sibley*, passim.

impression upon him that he never forgot her name, and absorbed the atmosphere of the borderland between civilization and savagery.

Their ensuing expedition was up the Minnesota one hundred and fifteen miles to the Big Swan Lake, the summer encampment of the Sissiton Sioux, where Frémont had another opportunity to study Indian life; and thence westward over the high plains to the Red Pipestone Quarry. This pipestone was found in a great red bluff, which for a distance of three miles overhung one of the valleys through which the buffalo poured in their annual migrations.[1] Tradition had it that the tread of these countless herds had exposed the pipestone. Here the expedition and a party of friendly Sioux spent three days in company, Nicollet's men helping the Indians by blasting out the pipestone lode with gunpowder. The white men then took up their march northward, over the high prairie plateau, 1,500 feet above sea level, and studded with lakes, where the air was sparkling and invigorating. Reaching the Lac qui Parle, they camped at the trading post of the Renville family, where Frémont found another valuable mentor. Joseph Renville was a half-breed born in this region, who had been a captain in the British forces in the War of 1812, had accompanied the expeditions of Zebulon Pike and Major S. H. Long as guide, and had become one of the ablest fur traders of the Northwest. Near Lac qui Parle, he had built a stockaded post called Fort Renville, and

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 34, 35.

maintained it as a base for a large force of voyageurs, half-breeds, and Indian hangers-on, whom he dominated in an easy baronial fashion. He needed their protection for his herds of horses, cattle, and sheep; and they needed the employment and the bounty he gave them. Once more Frémont had an opportunity to see how a man of energy, decision, and tact exercised a sway over large Indian tribes, for Renville and his son were regarded with the utmost deference by the savages who roamed the great regions westward and northward for hundreds of miles.[1]

Frémont's northern expedition concluded with a glorious hunting trip, undertaken in company with Sibley and another experienced trader of the American Fur Company, whose name is written into Minnesota history, Jean Baptiste Faribault. These three took with them on their excursion the whole of a Sioux village under the chief, Red Dog, a clamorous, excitable crowd, and set off southward. After some days, they reached the Iowa hunting grounds, and gave themselves up to killing deer and elk. To the end of his career, Frémont remembered the glorious picturesqueness of the camp life ". . . . along the woods, bright fires, where fat venison was roasting on sticks before them, or stewing with corn or wild rice in pots hanging from tripods; squaws busy over the cooking, and children rolling about over the ground. No sleep is better or more restoring than follows such a dinner, earned by such a day." They met

[1] *Minnesota Historical Collections*, I, 196 ff.

some ordinary hardships and risks, including a prairie fire whose roar and glare aroused them in the middle of the night from a sound sleep, and gave them just time to set a counter fire and transfer their beasts and baggage to cleared ground before it swept past them in a sheet of flame. They had, what was more important, an intimate taste of Indian life. Frémont remarks that on the march, one day, a squaw dropped behind, but came into camp a little later than the others, bringing a baby a few hours old.[1]

Late in 1838, the party returned to St. Louis and prepared for the work of the next year, which was to carry them to the upper Missouri. They hired a number of men as the nucleus of their party, including one Louis Zindel, a Prussian artilleryman skilled in making rockets, and a famous frontiersman, Étienne Provot, "the man of the mountains." Not even Kit Carson or Jim Bridger was more familiar with the dangerous West than Provot, after whom the city of Provo, Utah, was later named.[2]

This little group left St. Louis as soon as the annual rise of the Missouri River followed the melting of the snows in the Rockies, that is, in early April, 1839, on the steamboat *Antelope,* belonging to the American Fur Company. It took them nearly two and a half months to struggle northward against the rushing, turbid current. Their little vessel rasped against snags and ground

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs,* 37.

[2] See J. Cecil Alter, *James Bridger, Trapper, Frontiersman, Scout, and Guide,* 5.

over sand bars; at times the current was so swift that the boat would hang perfectly motionless for a time, seeming to rally her strength till, with a roar of the exhaust pipes, she would fight her way into smoother waters. Torn branches, uprooted shrubs, and other débris sailed past them in the yellow water. Wicked-looking snags lifted their heads above the current. Moreover, it was almost impossible at moments to find the channel, for the Missouri continually changed its course, wearing away ragged islands and cutting across peninsulas. For the steamboat to lose her way in the shallows was to thrust herself into a thick *chevaux de frise* of trees and limbs brought down by the flood, embedded like a military abattis in the sand.[1]

The river grew lonelier and lonelier, and the intense stillness, broken only by the echo from the exhaust pipe, the washing of the waves, and the sudden splash of a distant bank caving into the water, impressed the imagination of the travelers. At first the country was monotonous, but the shore line became steadily more attractive. Sometimes the party would find themselves running between high perpendicular cliffs of gray and yellow rock, with shrubbery and trees nodding over their brows; sometimes the river opened out into a flat expanse over which it wandered in several channels, as if it were a delta breaking into the sea. On the seventieth day, they reached Fort Pierre, 1,300 miles above St. Louis, the principal post of the American Fur Company

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 38; cf. Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, Ch. I.

on the upper Missouri. This was near the center of what is now South Dakota, and was surrounded on all sides by the wild country of the Indian and the buffalo. A large village of Yankton Sioux stood several miles distant, and Nicollet at once gave the chiefs, a noble-looking set of men, gifts which ratified their promises of good will and free passage.

This time Frémont participated in the equipment of a really large expedition, for six men were added to the party, making nineteen in all; thirty-three horses were procured, and ten carts were loaded with stores. The caravan was ferried across the river and set off eastward, over the plateau which the half-breeds called the Coteau de Missouri, nearly 2,000 feet above sea level. The river itself flowed 500 feet below them. Frémont's days, as they moved forward by astronomical reckoning, were at first unburdened, for the level plains required no sketching. He spent them chiefly with Louison Frenière, a half-breed guide from Fort Pierre who had local fame as a horseman and a hunter. The two rode far ahead of their companions to spy out the country and kill buffalo. For a young man of twenty-six, it was an exhilarating employment. The grand simplicity of the prairie, its grass thrown into waves by the wind, the broad shadows of the clouds chasing each other across its sunny bosom, had an impressive beauty. They saw the giant thunderheads mount like blue snow-capped peaks in the West. The long rolling slopes were gay with puccoon, red Indian-pipe, mullein

flower, and wild rose; little silver streams laced the green prairie at intervals, and frequently they came upon pretty lakelets, bordered with rocks, aspens, and grasses growing into the water. Frémont took an eager interest in the moving shapes on the horizon, and in Fresnière's skill in determining, at an astonishing distance, whether they represented antelope, buffalo, white men, or Indians. Where another man would have distinguished nothing, his practiced eye told him whether they were enemies or friends.

It was an exciting moment for the young explorer when, in the district between the Cheyenne River and Rivière à Jacques,[1] they came into contact with the illimitable buffalo herds moving slowly southwest toward the plains along the upper Missouri. Here were ponderous old bulls, enormous in size and weight, their eyes glaring from matted forelocks, their manes hanging shaggily down their necks, and patches of last year's hair standing like tattered islands on their backs; lean and restless cows, and, under their anxious eyes, calves playing antics through the herd. The whole face of the prairie, as far as the eye could reach, was dotted with them. They trooped along in columns beside the expedition, or gathered in grazing knots; farther beyond, they were seen scrambling, tails erect, over sudden hillocks; and in the remote distance the pale blue swells were peppered with groups and individuals. For three

[1] Usually identified with the James River; see Frederick S. Dellenbaugh, *Frémont and '49*, 14.

days, Frémont and Nicollet were in the midst of the concourse of bison, threading their way through the herds by day and so closely pressed by them at night that it was necessary to hobble some of their horses and mules, and to picket them all. It was a vividly memorable experience.

While the expedition was still pushing through these masses, it fell in with an encampment of about 2,000 Sioux, engaged in slaughtering game and about to arrange a grand "surround" of buffalo. It would have been dangerous to interfere with the maneuver, and Nicollet wisely sent Frenière to request the chiefs to point out the best time and route for the white men to continue their march. With characteristic hospitality, the Sioux invited Nicollet's party to join their village. Not only were they cordially received, but they were bidden to the lodges of the chiefs to dine, and had to give a return feast. Frémont watched the scene with open eyes:[1]

> The first dish was a generous *pot-au-feu,* principally of fat buffalo meat and rice. No one would begin till all the plates were filled. When all was ready the feast began. With the first mouthful each Indian silently laid down his spoon, and each looked at the other. After a pause of bewilderment the interpreter succeeded in having the situation understood. Mr. Nicollet had put among our provisions some Swiss cheese, and to give flavor to the

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs,* 48.

Buffalo Escaping from a Prairie Fire
(From Frémont's "Memoirs" Chicago, 1887.)

soup a liberal portion of this had been put into the kettles. Until this strange flavor was accounted for the Indians thought they were being poisoned; but, the cheese being shown to them and explanation made, confidence was restored; and by the aid of several kettles of water well sweetened with molasses, the dinner party went on and terminated in great good humor and general satisfaction.

Frémont was an alert observer of the Indian "surround" the following day. This was a grand slaughter of buffalo, followed by the cutting-up of many cows, and the draping of the meat over long lines of scaffolds scattered about the encampment, to be dried by the sun. Feasting and dancing were prolonged throughout the night. He was interested also in observing a few days later, on the shores of Devil's Lake, traces of a large hunting camp of the Bois Brulés—the half-breeds—of the Red River of the North. The ashes of camp fires, the deeply trodden ground and trails, and the ruts cut by heavily laden carts, showed that the great annual hunt had been successful. These half-breeds or quarter-breeds came down from Canada, where the buffalo were growing scarcer and scarcer. They brought carts built to carry the meat of ten animals each, which they made into pemmican; that is, they dried the meat by sun or fire, pounded it into a coarse fibrous mass, mixed it with melted fat, and packed it into skin sacks. This pemmican was of two grades, the coarser pemmican of com-

merce, and a finer compound consisting of the choicest steaks carefully kneaded up with the marrow. The *Gens Libres,* or Free People of the North, as the half-breeds were also known, were a picturesque race, living on the sale of meat and robes, and keeping the Indians at a distance with their rifles.

From Devil's Lake, the expedition, much tormented by mosquitoes, turned eastward across the plateau toward the channel of the Red River. They crossed the highest point of the plateau at a height of 1,500 feet above the sea, and came immediately within view of the far-stretching valley of the river, its green wooded margin extending north toward the Canadian line. They explored its headwaters; they traversed the beautiful lake region of western Minnesota; and then, descending to the lower prairies, they pursued their line of march to the Lac qui Parle, where the Renvilles once more greeted them with open arms at their trading post. Here they lingered, making various brief excursions with the Renvilles, until the autumn was far advanced.

Forever afterward, Frémont remembered the rare beauty of the prairies as the slow northern fall came on, turning the leaves of the aspens to gold and the cottonwoods to silver, and brightening the far-spreading plains with clumps of sere buffalo grass and varicolored flowers. The lowlands near the Renville post were sprinkled with purple asters and ablaze with goldenrod, and the contrast of the two colors was unforgettable.[1]

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs,* 53.

The expedition descended the Minnesota and the Mississippi, and, early in November, Frémont, paddling down the latter stream in a bark canoe with a detachment of the party, found himself approaching Prairie du Chien. Here he learned a final lesson in the art of exploration—the lesson of the need for seizing time by the forelock:

> A steamboat at the landing was firing up and just about starting for St. Louis, but we thought it would be pleasant to rest a day or two and enjoy comfortable quarters while waiting for the next boat. But the next boat was in the spring, for next morning it was snowing hard, and the river was frozen from bank to bank. I had time enough while there to learn two things: one, how to skate; the other, the value of a day.

It was necessary for the young explorer to take a wagon, and only after a wearisome journey over rough winter roads through western Illinois did he reach St. Louis. Thence, as soon as the affairs of the expedition had been settled, he posted to Washington to assist Nicollet in working up his material into a well-digested report, illustrated by maps.

The final phase of Frémont's apprenticeship was now complete. He had made the acquaintance of a great region of the unknown Northwest; he had been a comrade with voyageurs, scouts, fur traders, frontier soldiers, and Red Indians; he had acquired invaluable

lessons from Sibley, Chouteau, Renville, and Prévost; he had learned how to deal with buffalo, prairie fires, and inarticulate Sioux chiefs. Above all, through association with Nicollet, he had been taught how to make the exploration of a new country scientifically profitable—how to map it, to set down accurate astronomical observations at every halt, to observe narrowly its botany and geology. He had served in the best school that could have been devised, and his quickness of mind, his ardor of temperament, and his zest for the open had enabled him to make the utmost of the tuition. He had found the field which he loved best and in which he lived, as he wrote later, "with the true Greek joy in existence, in the gladness of living." [1]

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 602.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE MEETING WITH JESSIE

FRÉMONT returned to Washington the possessor for the first time of a certain dignity: he could talk to less fortunate officers with a casual air of what he had seen beyond the Mississippi, and he could feel that he was regarded as a young man of promise in the scientific service. Nicollet took him to call upon President Van Buren and Secretary Poinsett. We can imagine the young explorer, erect, tanned, with his strangely sharp, intense eyes, handsome features, and quick movements, standing before the suave and genial Van Buren in the White House, and listening modestly as Nicollet referred to his able assistance. The President was, as always, cordial and appreciative. Nicollet also took pains to impress upon Poinsett the fact that the latter had made no error in his choice of a protégé, and the South Carolinian was deeply pleased.[1]

For some weeks Frémont and Nicollet, now the best of comrades, enjoyed a happy vacation from all duties. They went to Baltimore, where the friends of the Frenchman, particularly the higher officers of the Catholic hierarchy, gave them a royal welcome; and Frémont had an opportunity to observe men of elevated and un-

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 55.

worldly lives, who combined high culture with generous aims. Their headquarters there were at St. Mary's College, in which comfortable rooms were always kept ready for M. Nicollet, and the presiding bishop made them both at home. Nicollet amused himself by showing his assistant, who for months had seen him in a rough frontier garb, a wardrobe filled with fine linen and other sartorial luxuries. The two were out much at dinner, were entertained in the best Baltimore homes, and enjoyed to the utmost their return to the comforts of civilization. From this halcyon life, Frémont was sharply called away by the death of his brother in South Carolina, and he obtained leave to visit Charleston to comfort his aged mother. They had a short time with each other, and then he returned to Washington.

This was Frémont's first opportunity to observe at leisure the capital and its society. Washington was then a country town rather than a national center. Of all the broad streets, only Pennsylvania Avenue between the White House and the Capitol had been paved; the others were deep in mud in winter and in spring, and sent forth choking clouds of dust during the hot weather. The homes and shops were scattered over the open fields at wide intervals, "like the teeth of some superannuated crone." [1] Many streets, avenues, and circles were marked by a single dwelling standing alone in the waste of clay. The hills and valleys had not been touched, and the irregularities of level were to remain until decades later

[1] Epes Sargent, *Public Men and Events*, I, 54.

when "Boss" Shepherd undertook to renovate Washington. Harriet Martineau had recently written that the town showed nothing but "a few mean houses dotted about, the sheds of the navy yard on one bank of the Potomac, and three or four villas on the other." [1] There were a few really fine mansions on Capitol Hill, while the section about the White House—"the Co't End"—boasted a considerable group of others. But west of the White House, little was to be seen but pastures and ill-fenced fields, while east of the Capitol there lay a series of quagmires, sending up miasmatic fogs at night, and all the efforts to build up a respectable city between the two had failed.

Frémont and Nicollet soon made a convenient arrangement for living and working together, and indulged in some luxuries which set their mark upon Frémont's taste throughout his life. It happened that Nicollet was intimate with the superintendent of the Coast Survey, another gifted scientist named Hassler, a bachelor who played a conspicuous part in Washington social life. The two agreed to live together in Hassler's house, which stood on the slopes of Capitol Hill, overlooking the Potomac, not far from the Coast Survey building, and to find room for Frémont also. Here, in a large apartment, and in the Survey building itself, the map work for the three years of exploration was done. Hassler, a man of Swiss birth, was a pungent and picturesque personality, abrupt, intolerant of pretence,

[1] *Retrospect of Western Travel*, I, 160.

impatient of obstruction, and sharp-tongued. Thin, tall, and intellectual looking, dressed in white flannels, he used to be driven through the streets in what he called the "ark," a huge comfortable carriage which he used in visiting his surveying parties, and which was packed with red and white German wines, choice foods, and soft bedding. With his forthright, imperious ways, he stood in sharp contrast to the urbane Nicollet. Frémont had much to learn from him in a scientific way, and all the explorer's later work bore the impress of this tuition.[2] Nicollet built an observatory on top of the residence, and the three carried on observations from it nightly. They led a pleasant existence. Hassler had a competent French chef, a sign of great distinction then and for decades later; the cuisine was excellent, the house was admirably furnished, and there was a good deal of entertaining.

In this town of 30,000 people, everyone of importance soon knew everybody else, and Frémont, under the protection of two such eligible bachelors, had the entrée to the best homes. He saw or cared little for the purely political circles. Many members of Congress, living in hotels and boarding houses, formed little groups or "messes," each mess having a table to itself and making an arrangement with the landlady for food. But he became a familiar figure at the balls, which were glittering affairs, with a sprinkling of distinguished visitors from other cities and from Europe. Among the more

[2] F. S. Dellenbaugh, *Frémont and '49*, 15.

imposing mansions were those of John Tayloe, on Eighteenth Street, designed by Thornton in such exquisite taste that, as the "Octagon House," it is still preserved by the Institute of American Architects; and of John Van Ness, which Latrobe had designed and erected at a cost of $60,000. On the square, near the White House, the venerable Mrs. Madison, conspicuous for her old-fashioned costume, snowy turban, and dignified manners, held court. Poinsett had a hospitable ménage of his own, where Frémont was always welcome, and the wives of other Secretaries entertained frequently. At the dancing parties, lasting till three in the morning, and consisting rather more of elderly people than of youths, Frémont was in demand for his vivacity, his handsome if rather dapper figure, and his ability to talk of South American ports and Western wigwams. He liked these diversions. They broke in agreeably upon his work over the maps in the daytime, and the work in the observatory with M. Nicollet at night, watching the stars and making astronomical calculations.

It was inevitable that this social round, this association with Nicollet and Poinsett, should bring to young Frémont connections of lasting importance. The country in those early months of 1840, was just beginning to swing into the most exciting presidential campaign it had yet experienced. But not everyone was talking politics. A good many were talking of Texas, of the Oregon country, and of the development of the West.

It was with these men that Frémont was naturally thrown, and there resulted the most important event of his life, shaping and illuminating his whole later career.

Like so much else in Frémont's life, it was superficially a casual event, but actually not at all an accident. Colonel Thomas Hart Benton at this time had his home on C Street, with intimate friends living all about him. John A. Dix was soon to take up his residence two or three doors away; Philip Barton Key and his beautiful wife lived near by.[1] Poinsett and Benton were good friends, chiefly through their common interest in Western expansion. The Missourian, now almost fifty, was well launched upon his senatorial career of thirty years. Reared on the border, representing the farthest outpost among the states, he was unwearied in arguing the "manifest destiny" of the United States to expand westward to the Pacific. His long-established position as leader of the Jackson Democrats in the Senate had made him a national power, and he threw all his influence into the expansionist cause. Frémont was soon introduced to him—the first meeting occurred at Poinsett's house—and the two found much in common.[2] Benton's delight in the immense possibilities of the West, and his desire to see all the country to the Oregon coast promptly occupied, led him to call frequently at the Coast Survey office to study Nicollet's maps. Frémont

[1] *Memoirs of John A. Dix*, I, 249.
[2] *Jessie Benton Frémont MSS.*

explained the details to him. In return, Benton, always ready to expound his vision of the future, dwelt upon the opportunities for exploration beyond the Missouri. This great wilderness region, as yet known only by the reports of a few travelers, offered just such a challenge to adventurous scientists as did Africa a few decades later. It should be penetrated, said Benton, and its resources advertised to the American people. Moreover, roads through it should be opened and settlement encouraged. He wished to see the lower Columbia River occupied by emigrants and the American title to the whole rich valley enforced.

Many men would have refused to take Benton very seriously, for he was regarded by most observers as a prejudiced, long-winded, humorless crank on this and other topics. When he rose, the Senate Chamber emptied and the visitors in the gallery filed out to avoid his interminably long and diffusive speech. He was pompous, arrogant, and conceited to the last degree. Some of the stories which have been preserved to illustrate his self-esteem are almost incredible. When the publishers of his *Thirty Years' View* asked him what he supposed would be the number of copies required, he remarked with crushing dignity: "Sir, I believe that the census tells you how many families there are in the United States." When he was complimented upon having made a striking impression by a stump speech, he answered: "Always the case, sir—always the case." He assured the Senate upon one occasion that small boys playing in

the remoter parts of the Republic were year by year learning of his achievements, and finding in them an irresistible incitement to patriotic ambition and public service.

Few men have shown greater bitterness of personal and political prejudice, and repeatedly he was hardly on speaking terms with such opponents as Webster and Clay. Stiff-necked and self-confident, he never surrendered a position which he had once assumed, as he proved in his long fight to expunge Clay's resolution of censure upon President Jackson from the journals of the Senate. Yet the peppery, imperious Senator had many admirable qualities. He was a man of assiduous scholarship, breadth of view, and a high sense of civic responsibility. A southerner and a slaveholder, he was convinced that the institution of slavery was an evil, and opposed its spread to new lands. In his expansionist crusade he adhered strictly to principle, and he opposed those who set up the cry of "Fifty-four forty or fight" in the Oregon controversy, holding from beginning to end that the 49th parallel was the proper line. Intellectually, as his biographer Roosevelt has said, he was far inferior to Webster; morally, he was far superior. His public and personal life was unsullied. Austere, of imposing dignity, loyal to his friends but never encouraging intimacy, he showed a reserve and polish that were refreshing in a period when Jacksonian informality and conviviality were the rule.

Frémont recognized Benton's genuine statesmanship;

THOMAS HART BENTON ABOUT 1840
(Born 1782; Senator from Missouri, 1820–1851; died 1858.)

he did so the more readily because the Senator was remarkably well versed in geography and travel. He had not himself ranged widely, but he devoured every book and article upon exploration, and took pains to talk with every man who had penetrated the unmapped West. Upon these subjects he was pronounced better than any reference library.[1] Frémont's interviews with him profoundly touched the imagination of the young man. Up to this moment the lieutenant had been devoted to his intended profession, engineering. Now he saw open before him the possibility of pinning his name to the western map, and of grasping fame as the pathfinder of the great plains and the mountain region. In this undertaking there would be adventure, activity, scope for all his energies and ambitions, and perhaps fortune. "This interview with Mr. Benton," he exclaimed later of their first long talk, "was pregnant with results and decisive of my life." Fired by his new aims, he began spending more and more time with the Senator. He and Nicollet were frequently at the Benton home, where they talked with Senator Linn of Missouri, Senator Robinson of Illinois, and others who were keenly interested in opening up the Far West. Nicollet's health was poor, and the energy and vivacity of the younger officer brought him more and more into the foreground at the very time that the talk grew definite regarding a plan for a new expedition beyond the Missouri.[2]

[1] Theodore Roosevelt, *Life of Thomas Hart Benton*, 36.
[2] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 66.

The Benton family at this time consisted of five children, and Frémont caught glimpses of a disciplined and elevated home life which seemed very attractive to him. He learned of the Senator's exacting habits of work: every morning Benton rose before six o'clock, lit his fire, took a cold bath, "curried" himself, as he put it, with some stiff brushes, and sat down in his dressing gown of white flannel to his writing. For light, he depended upon an ingenious candelabrum of his own invention, with four spermaceti candles fastened in front of a large square of white blotting paper which reinforced their illumination.[1] He and Mrs. Benton were devoted to one another. They insisted that the children should be carefully dressed for dinner, should be in the drawing-room before five, when it was served, and should make the meal cheery and pleasant. If anyone offended against this last rule by bringing a disagreeable topic to the table, punishment by exclusion from the circle on the next day always followed. At the time when Frémont first became familiar with the household, only three of the children—the two youngest daughters and the son Randolph—were at home, for the two oldest daughters, Sarah and Jessie, were at Miss English's boarding school in Georgetown, three miles away. It was the most fashionable school in or near the capital, with a Danish lady for principal, a staff of more than a score of teachers, a hundred boarding pupils, and many day scholars. The roster included Fitzhughs,

[1] *Jessie Benton Frémont MSS.*

Calverts, and even a Washington. But the Benton daughters, always reared in a simple, wholesome way, were not sent to it because it was fashionable. Sarah, in ailing health, needed a special regimen; both needed good tuition; and the blooming Jessie was shut in the school partly to avoid suitors—she had already received two direct proposals of marriage.[1]

It was not long before Frémont and Jessie met. The young officer went to the boarding school with some members of the Benton family to hear a concert. It was love at first sight. Jessie was not yet sixteen, at the height of her girlish beauty, but with qualities that were all womanly. Frémont, who had not seen many pretty girls since his long stay on the frontier, was in a susceptible mood. He was carried away by Jessie's brown hair and bright brown eyes, her lovely oval face, and rich high-colored complexion, her sparkle and vivacity, which more than matched his own; her grasp of mind, her tenacious memory, and her quick perceptions, all inherited from her father; and he perceived also a quality of imagination which the Senator never possessed. In fact, Jessie was known in the capital as a girl of rare character and brilliancy, who gave promise of a still rarer womanhood. For her part, she responded as quickly to Frémont's dash, energy, and impetuosity. Years later people recalled him as "the handsomest young man who ever walked the streets of Washington." She was naturally warm-hearted, or as she said,

[1] *Jessie Benton Frémont MSS.*

endowed with a *besoin d'aimer*. Each was soon aware of the other's feelings, and neither had the temperament for much restraint. "There came a glow into my heart," Frémont wrote decades after, "which changed the current and color of daily life, and gave beauty to common things."

Months passed before Jessie, coming home for a vacation, was able to see the ardent lieutenant with any frequency. When she did return, his visits to the Benton home grew more numerous than ever, and their object was not long in doubt. The Senator and Mrs. Benton became alarmed.

It was a little hard to exclude an irreproachable officer from the hospitable Benton home. By fixed custom friends and neighbors were always welcome to the evening circle in the drawing-room upstairs. Here, if the weather was chilly, a bright fire snapped on the hearth. On one side of the fireplace, the Senator had a large table with his evening mail, and the book he was then reading, its pages illuminated by his ingenious candelabrum or by an astral lamp. On the other side was Mrs. Benton, sitting placidly at a smaller table, her hands busy with knitting or embroidery. The four sisters had a great heavy square desk with shaded lamp, workbaskets, and portfolios; and as they were good musicians, if any guest requested it, one of them would play, and Jessie and another sister, who had a beautiful contralto voice, would sing. It was in these surroundings that the courtship was carried on, and it progressed

so rapidly that the parents finally interfered. They liked and admired Frémont, but he was very poor, his salary was meager, and army promotion was slow. As yet his future seemed anything but bright. Jessie's parents lectured her, and the Senator intimated to Frémont that she was far too young to think of marriage, and that when she did, they hoped she would not be subjected to the unsettled existence of an army officer's wife. By the winter of 1840-41, it was understood that Frémont was not to see Jessie except on rare occasions.

But the attachment was too ardent to be halted, and it was soon necessary for the Bentons to interfere more decisively. The need for such action became emphatically clear on the occasion of President Harrison's funeral, just a month after his festal Inauguration. Since the Benton home did not command a view of the funeral procession, Frémont asked Jessie, her grandmother, and a few friends to watch it from Hassler's house, which overlooked Pennsylvania Avenue and the ascent to Capitol Hill. The large workroom here was selected for the party; the working tables were carried up to another floor; and the place was made attractive by potted flowers and nosegays. A cheerful fire had been kindled on the hearth, for it was a chill gray day outside, and it threw its gleam over a pretty tea table, laden with cakes, French sweets, and ices.[1] The grandmother was the guest of honor, and ostensibly the flowers and delicacies were all for her. While the elders of the

[1] Jessie Benton Frémont, *Souvenirs of My Time*, 36–38.

group were troubled by the expense to which this "poor army man" had gone in entertaining them, Frémont, exalted and happy, was everywhere in ministering to his guests' comfort. Without regard for his best uniform, he brought in logs and kept the fire blazing; he served the tea and the ices with his own hands. Outside there was the tramp of a great and mournful crowd in the raw cold of early April, and the wailing of dirges as the plumed hearse carried Harrison's body, behind six white horses, to the Congressional Burying Ground. Inside, as Jessie put it, was "our friendly group excited and amused (and two entirely content)." While the others were intent upon the funeral procession, these two decisively plighted their troth.[1]

The happiness of the pair was quite plain, and when next day Frémont sent all the geraniums and roses to Jessie's mother, with a graceful message, she and the Senator decided that the situation was growing dangerous. They laid a shrewd plan. Mrs. Benton knew Mrs. Poinsett well, and going to her, frankly stated the case: Jessie's extreme youth, Frémont's poverty, and the need for a separation. The Poinsetts agreed, and Frémont was astonished by orders suddenly detaching him from his duty of map making, and directing him to proceed at once to make a survey of the Des Moines River in Iowa Territory, the stream along which the Sauk and Fox dwelt. Nicollet protested that he could ill spare his most efficient and experienced aide,

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 68.

but in vain. *"Il y a quelque diablerie là-dedans,"* the French scientist said, shaking his head,[1] and Frémont set hurriedly off by stagecoach. To be given charge of this reconnaissance was a promotion, but he went reluctantly.[2] Jessie mourned for him for a few days, and then she too was caught up and taken south to Lexington, Virginia, where a great wedding in her mother's family, with thirty-five house guests, was to occur. The lovers were not left without hopes. There had been an agreement, at least informal and tacit, between them and Jessie's parents, that their engagement was to have a year's probation, and that at the end of that period they might, if their minds were unchanged, be married.

[1] *Jessie Benton Frémont MSS.*
[2] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 68, 69.

## CHAPTER V

## A RUNAWAY MARRIAGE

With Frémont's labors along the Des Moines River, we have little concern; but in what occurred in Washington during his absence, and in the events immediately following his return, we have a strong interest. Neither he nor Nicollet regarded the Iowa expedition as of great importance. Secretary Poinsett had alleged that a careful plotting of the Des Moines should be added to their map of the Mississippi-Missouri system, and Nicollet had reluctantly acquiesced. The Territory of Iowa, which at this time included that part of Minnesota lying west of the Mississippi, had about 45,000 people, for the most part clinging rather closely to the Mississippi River. The Des Moines, which flows into the larger stream near Keokuk, and which drains a great part of the central and southern districts of Iowa, was still almost wholly wild. Not for two years was the town of Ottumwa to be established on its banks; not for two years was Fort Des Moines, on the site of the city of that name, to be built to protect the rights of the Sauk and Fox.

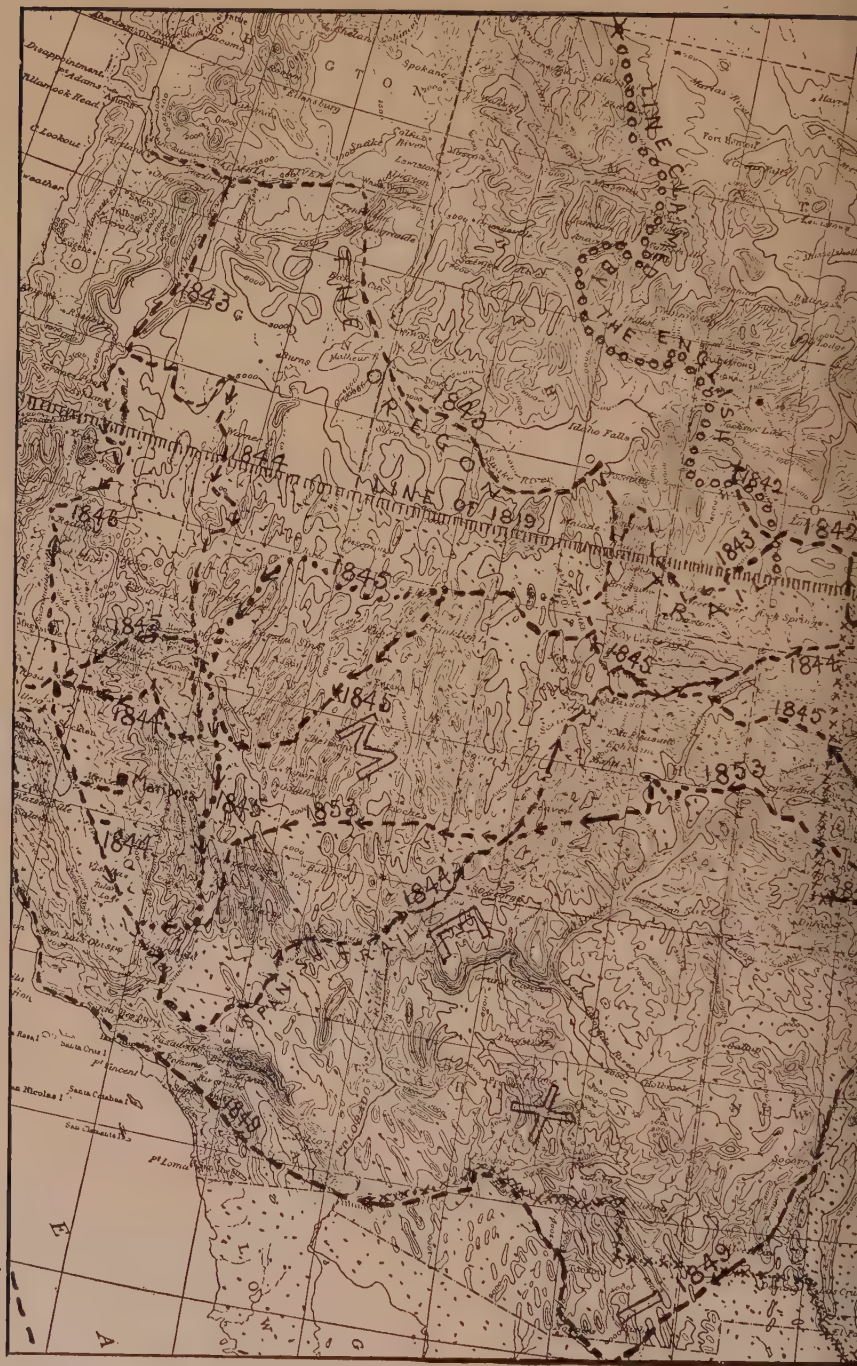
But settlement was pressing rapidly into the region, and a really accurate topographical survey of it, with a map, would be of material value. Frémont was ex-

pected to complete his task within six months. He proceeded to St. Louis, enlisted the aid of his old acquaintance, Pierre Chouteau, hired the botanist Charles Geyer, a skilled scientist of German birth, to accompany him, and set forth up the river. His party included several voyageurs who had been with him and Nicollet on their previous expeditions; Geyer also had been with them, and his advice and aid were now invaluable.

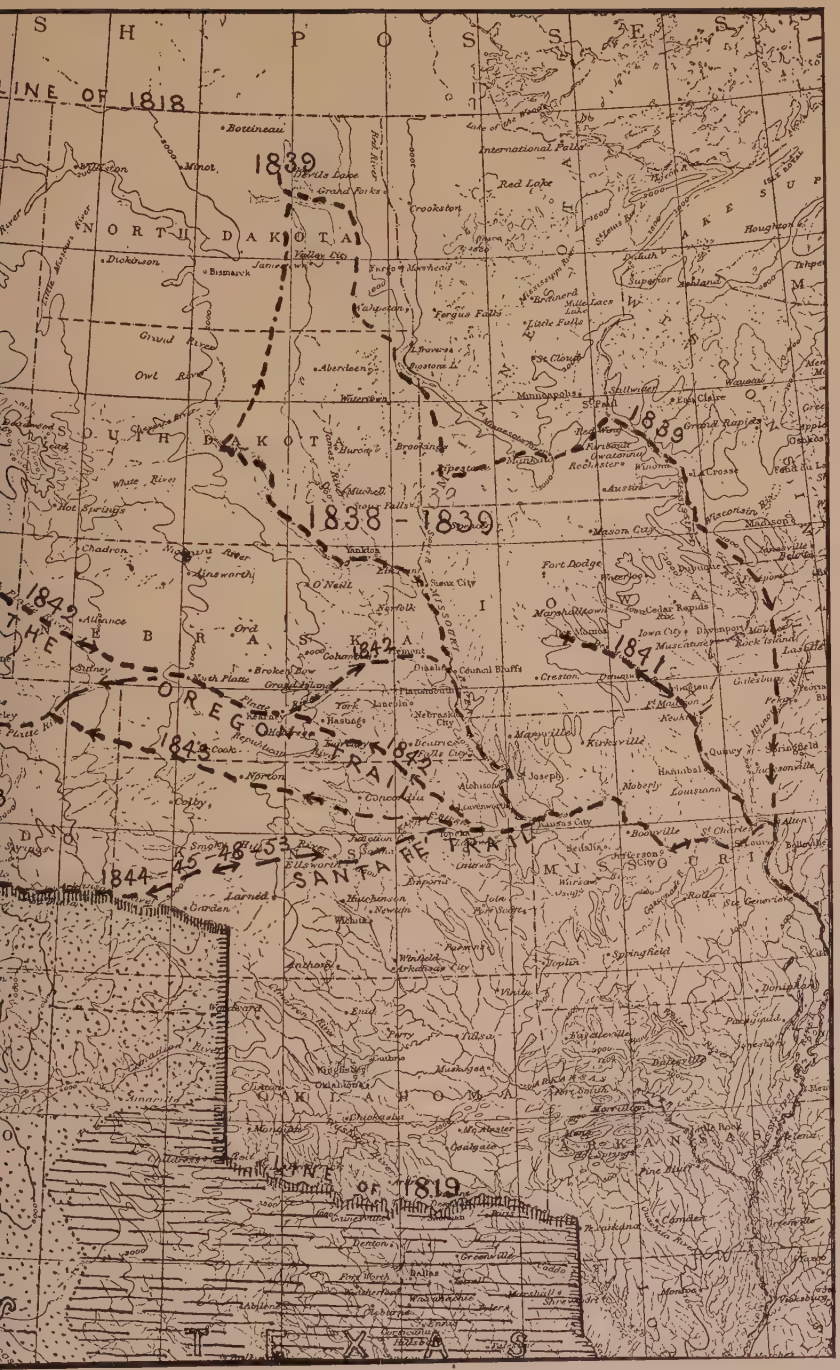
A letter of Nicollet's to his young friend, which incidentally illustrates the deep affection which had grown up between them, indicates what was passing through their minds during the summer months of 1841. Dated at Washington on July 11, it replied to a note which Frémont had sent from St. Louis on June 23, just as he was starting northward. "I assure you," said Nicollet, "that our separation gives me as much pain here as it did to you in St. Louis." He was pleased to learn that all the preparations for the short but interesting mission had gone smoothly, and he was particularly gratified to hear that Geyer was with Frémont. "You had hardly left Baltimore when the idea occurred to me, and I should have written to St. Louis to suggest it had I not believed that M. Geyer was probably otherwise engaged and would not be able to accept your offer." Calculating the date of Frémont's arrival at the forks of the Raccoon and the Des Moines, Nicollet found that he could not have the benefit of the moon, at least before midnight, in making his astronomical calculations; but, he added, he could base them partly on

the sun. Geyer had fallen into money difficulties, and was in trouble with his landlord in St. Louis; in answer to an appeal for $200 which Frémont had sent in his behalf, Nicollet sent $100, regretting that it could not be more. It being impossible for him to send it direct to the landlord, and highly inadvisable as well, Nicollet had simply written M. Pierre Chouteau to credit Geyer with the amount—taking tactful care to conceal the reason for his act.

Everything, pursued Nicollet, was going well in the office in Washington, where they were working hard, and their relations with their superiors were harmonious. They had spent twenty-six days in revising the map, and had written all the notes which accompanied it: "there remains only your work upon the Des Moines, and to finish the topography." He had been particularly pleased to find that there was nothing to change "in your admirable Missouri"—that is, in Frémont's map of the stream. Two small errors in the plotting, and two errors in calculations, had offered some temporary difficulty, but that was now overcome. He sent Frémont some messages to deliver to two friends in St. Louis, Dr. Engelmann and Mr. Goebel; he asked him to remind Geyer that he particularly wished a search made for the fossils in the environs of St. Louis. "I shall await you," he concluded, "with open arms to embrace you and congratulate you." All this we can fancy Frémont perusing with interest. But the one




Frémont's E
(From "Frémont and '49," by co


LINE OF 1818
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OREGON TRAIL
SANTA FE TRAIL
LINE OF 1819
NORTH DAKOTA
SOUTH DAKOTA
NEBRASKA
KANSAS
OKLAHOMA
MISSOURI
MINNESOTA
IOWA
WISCONSIN
Bottineau
Minot
Bismarck
Dickinson
Devils Lake
Grand Forks
Crookston
International Falls
Red Lake
Duluth
Superior
Houghton
Fergus Falls
Little Falls
Aberdeen
Watertown
Minneapolis
St. Paul
Eau Claire
Grand Rapids
Huron
Brookings
Rochester
La Crosse
Mitchell
Sioux Falls
Mason City
Madison
Chadron
Yankton
Sioux City
Fort Dodge
O'Neill
Norfolk
Cedar Rapids
Ord
Alliance
Kearney
Hastings
Omaha
Council Bluffs
Iowa City
Davenport
Rock Island
Broken Bow
Grand Island
Creston
Nebraska City
Kirksville
Quincy
Concordia
Beatrice
Marysville
Hannibal
Norton
Colby
Atchison
Joseph
Louisiana
Kansas City
Boonville
St. Charles
Larned
Hutchinson
Emporia
Jefferson City
Rolla
Newton
Wichita
Springfield
Arkansas City
Joplin
Enid
Tulsa
Fayetteville
Guthrie
Oklahoma City
Muskogee
Fort Smith
Pawhuska
Ponca City
Arkansas R.
Red R.
Denton
Greenville
Fort Worth
Dallas
Texarkana
Paris
Clarksville
Jefferson
Shreveport
Monroe
Vicksburg
Natchez
Meridian
Jackson
Vicksburg
Monticello
Pine Bluff
Camden
Little Rock
Morrilton
Fayetteville
Batesville
Jonesboro
Memphis
Helena
Greenville
Yazoo City
Greenwood
Grenada
Tupelo
Corinth
Iuka
Florence
Sheffield
Huntsville
Decatur
Tuscumbia
Athens
Pulaski
Columbia
Nashville
Gallatin
Hopkinsville
Paducah
Cairo
Carbondale
Mt. Vernon
Olney
Effingham
Centralia
Litchfield
Alton
Jacksonville
Springfield
Peoria
Bloomington
Galesburg
Rock Island
Moline
Dubuque
Clinton
Freeport
Rockford
Janesville
Madison
Milwaukee
Racine
Kenosha
Waukegan
Chicago
Gary
Michigan City
South Bend
Elkhart
Fort Wayne
Kendallville
Angola
Toledo
Detroit
Ann Arbor
Jackson
Lansing
Saginaw
Flint
Port Huron
Sarnia
Windsor
Kalamazoo
Grand Rapids
Muskegon
Traverse City
Petoskey
Mackinaw City
Sault Ste. Marie
Marquette
Escanaba
Iron Mountain
Menominee
Green Bay
Oshkosh
Fond du Lac
Sheboygan
Manitowoc
Two Rivers
Kewaunee
Door Peninsula
Sturgeon Bay
Marinette
Wausau
Stevens Point
Wisconsin Rapids
Portage
Baraboo
Reedsburg
Wisconsin River
Mississippi River
Missouri River
Red River
Lake of the Woods
Lake Superior
Lake Michigan
Lake Huron
Lake Erie
Lake Ontario
Lake Winnipeg
Lake Manitoba
Lake Winnipegosis
Lake Dauphin
Lake Manitou
Lake Traverse
Big Stone Lake
Lake Kampeska
Lake Poinsett
Lake Madison
Lake Herman
Lake Preston
Lake Thompson
Lake Albert
Lake Andes
Lake Francis Case
Lake Sharpe
Lake Oahe
Lake Sakakawea
Lake Audubon
Lake Darling
Lake Metigoshe
Lake Nettie
Lake Bronson
Lake of the Woods
Rainy Lake
Namakan Lake
Kabetogama Lake
Vermilion Lake
Basswood Lake
Crane Lake
Saganaga Lake
Gunflint Lake
Grand Portage
Isle Royale
Keweenaw Peninsula
Houghton
Hancock
Calumet
Copper Harbor
Eagle River
Ontonagon
Bessemer
Ironwood
Wakefield
Watersmeet
Iron River
Crystal Falls
Florence
Wausau
Merrill
Tomahawk
Rhinelander
Eagle River
Antigo
Shawano
Clintonville
Appleton
Neenah
Menasha
Oshkosh
Fond du Lac
Ripon
Berlin
Waupaca
Waupun
Beaver Dam
Watertown
Jefferson
Fort Atkinson
Whitewater
Elkhorn
Delavan
Lake Geneva
Burlington
Racine
Kenosha
Waukegan
Evanston
Chicago
Gary
Hammond
Whiting
Michigan City
La Porte
Valparaiso
Plymouth
South Bend
Mishawaka
Elkhart
Goshen
Warsaw
Wabash
Peru
Logansport
Kokomo
Marion
Muncie
Anderson
Indianapolis
Greenfield
Shelbyville
Greensburg
Columbus
Seymour
Madison
Vincennes
Washington
Jasper
Huntingburg
Evansville
Mount Vernon
New Harmony
Princeton
Boonville
Rockport
Owensboro
Henderson
Madisonville
Hopkinsville
Clarksville
Dover
Fort Donelson
Cumberland City
Dickson
Franklin
Columbia
Lawrenceburg
Pulaski
Fayetteville
Shelbyville
Murfreesboro
Lebanon
Gallatin
Hartsville
Cookeville
Crossville
Harriman
Kingston
Oak Ridge
Knoxville
Sevierville
Newport
Morristown
Greeneville
Johnson City
Kingsport
Bristol
Abingdon
Wytheville
Pulaski
Radford
Blacksburg
Christiansburg
Roanoke
Salem
Lexington
Buena Vista
Staunton
Waynesboro
Harrisonburg
Winchester
Front Royal
Strasburg
Woodstock
Martinsburg
Shepherdstown
Harpers Ferry
Charles Town
Leesburg
Alexandria
Fredericksburg
Richmond
Petersburg
Hopewell
Colonial Heights
Chesterfield
Ashland
Williamsburg
Newport News
Hampton
Norfolk
Virginia Beach
Chesapeake
Suffolk
Portsmouth
Elizabeth City
Edenton
Plymouth
Washington
New Bern
Morehead City
Beaufort
Jacksonville
Wilmington
Whiteville
Lumberton
Fayetteville
Laurinburg
Rockingham
Hamlet
Cheraw
Bennettsville
Florence
Darlington
Hartsville
Sumter
Camden
Kershaw
Lancaster
Chester
Rock Hill
York
Gaffney
Spartanburg
Greenville
Anderson
Clemson
Seneca
Walhalla
Greenwood
Abbeville
Laurens
Newberry
Columbia
Lexington
Aiken
Barnwell
Allendale
Hampton
Beaufort
Port Royal
Ridgeland
Hardeville
Savannah
Tybee Island
Hilton Head Island
Brunswick
St. Simons Island
Jekyll Island
Darien
Kingsland
St. Marys
Folkston
Waycross
Douglas
Fitzgerald
Cordele
Americus
Albany
Thomasville
Tallahassee
Quincy
Chattahoochee
Marianna
Panama City
Apalachicola
Port St. Joe
Carrabelle
Crawfordville
Perry
Cedar Key
Inverness
Brooksville
Dade City
Zephyrhills
Tarpon Springs
Clearwater
St. Petersburg
Bradenton
Sarasota
Venice
Fort Myers
Naples
Everglades City
Marco Island
Key West
Homestead
Miami
Fort Lauderdale
Hollywood
West Palm Beach
Boca Raton
Delray Beach
Boynton Beach
Lake Worth
Jupiter
Stuart
Fort Pierce
Vero Beach
Sebastian
Melbourne
Titusville
Cocoa
Cape Canaveral
Kissimmee
Orlando
Winter Park
Sanford
Deland
Daytona Beach
New Smyrna Beach
Ormond Beach
Palm Coast
Flagler Beach
St. Augustine
Jacksonville
Orange Park
Green Cove Springs
Starke
Lake City
Live Oak
Madison
Monticello
Perry
Valdosta
Moultrie
Tifton
Dublin
Vidalia
Swainsboro
Statesboro
Sylvania
Waynesboro
Augusta
Aiken
North Augusta
Edgefield
McCormick
Abbeville
Greenwood
Laurens
Clinton
Newberry
Chappells
Prosperity
Saluda
Batesburg-Leesville
Lexington
West Columbia
Cayce
Irmo
Chapin
Lake Murray
Gilbert
Pelion
Lexington
Swansea
Batesburg-Leesville
Saluda
Edgefield
North Augusta
Aiken
Barnwell
Allendale
Hampton
Ridgeland
Hardeville
Savannah
Tybee Island
Hilton Head Island
Beaufort
Port Royal
Parris

passage which the lieutenant read again and again and again occurred in the middle of the letter:[1]

> Everyone here and in Baltimore inquires after you; even the Benton household, every time I go there. The young girls returned home evening before last, ten days later than they were expected, on account of the grandmother, who died at the moment when they were about to set out on their journey to Washington. *Everything is going well; she is quite happy, and she is impatient to see you.*

If Jessie's parents expected her to change her mind about Frémont during his six months' absence, they knew less about their daughter than they should have known. Strength of will and constancy of purpose—a stubbornness like Benton's own—were among her salient characteristics. Her father had waited for seven years after his first rejection to marry her mother. Mrs. Benton had said that she would never marry a red-haired man, a Democrat, or an army man,[2] but her red-haired and Democratic suitor would not take a refusal. Jessie's purpose was fixed, and not to be thwarted.

Nor was she, despite the fact that she was less than seventeen and a half years old, unfit for the duties of wifehood. She was gifted with abounding energy. The oldest Benton daughter was delicate; but "I," she says,

[1] *Frémont MSS.*
[2] Jessie Benton Frémont, *MS. Memoirs.*

"was a perfectly healthy child. I don't remember a headache until I was twenty-three; gay-hearted, affectionate, with a keen delight in life, and that *besoin d'aimer* that made loving and being loved necessary to me." Strongly developed for her years, she was ready for any physical burden that might come to her. Her education had been remarkably wholesome and complete. From her earliest years she had been a comrade to Senator Benton. She wrote, long afterward: "I think I came into my father's life like a breath of his own compelling nature; strong, resolute, but open to all tender and gracious influences." She recalled how once, when she was three years old, her father found her sprawled on the floor of the library, covering the sheets of his latest speech with red and blue chalk marks, and how he asked angrily: "Who did this?" Instantly Jessie planted herself in front of him, and with a disarming smile found the weakest joint in his armor by saying: "It's a little girl that cries 'Hurrah for Jackson!'" From the time she learned to read she profited by Senator Benton's earnest mind and full information. The family had a large collection of books, and her taste in letters matured early. She was attracted at once to Shakespeare, and to "the British state trials; huge folios I came to know well through the full page illustrations before I could read."

She had the advantage also, a very great advantage for the future wife of an explorer, of acquaintance with widely different scenes and circles. The Bentons dur-

ing her girlhood possessed three homes. That in Washington was the official residence; that in Missouri, which the difficulties of travel at this time made it impossible to reach except in alternate years (after the short Congressional session), had wide grounds, green trees and shrubbery, and the gay companionship of many young French-Americans; but the all-important home in Jessie's eyes was her Grandfather McDowell's extensive estate in Virginia. She was brought up in the best circles of the Old Dominion. Her ancestry was linked with such patrician families as the Prestons and the Gooches, and when as a child she traveled down from Washington, to be met at Fredericksburg by her grandfather's carriages, she stopped every night from there to Lexington at some friendly mansion of importance.

She associated this ancestral estate with memories of its large park, with hunting, with gay masquerade parties, with negro mammies and uncles, with horses and dogs, and with a joyous outdoor life. Here she would follow her father as he shot quail, and eat lunch with him under some tree. Resting there in the southern sun, with the wind stirring her hair, she would lean against him while he read aloud a French edition of Homer, or the Arabian Nights. On the long trips to St. Louis, she delighted in the scenery of the Alleghenies; and the genial half-Southern, half-Western town, with the teeming activity of the mighty river, was always dear to her.

The varied nature of her training fed her natural

vivacity and interest in human affairs, and was one element in the captivating charm which she always possessed. Her ancestry was purely British. Her visits to Grandfather McDowell in Virginia made her familiar with the best Anglo-American tradition. Yet from infancy she was also imbued (and this fact must be remembered if we would grasp the perfect understanding that existed between her and Frémont) with the spirit of Franco-American life in the Southwest. In the East, she had French as well as English governesses. In St. Louis, the Benton household was surrounded by French families which took the most cordial interest in the children. One of the Senator's closest friends was a Colonel Garnier who had served in the Napoleonic campaigns in Spain and who talked of his experiences by the hour.

Benton always insisted that his children should assimilate knowledge, and not acquire it merely by "parroting." To Jessie's great delight, therefore, she was sent first in St. Louis to a strangely undisciplined, indolent school for practice in talking French with other children. Her mother's maid Sara, stiff and taciturn, conducted her and her sisters for the pleasant walk of a mile, drilling them in their "manners." When they passed the house of Mme. Desirée, the clear-starcher, Sara instructed them to speak politely, for she was a poor workingwoman and brusqueness might hurt her feelings. The house doors of the various Mme. Auguste's and Mme. Pierre's would be open, and the ladies

themselves, in easy négligé, would call the children into their large inner courtyards, pet them and praise them, and give them some fruit for a gift. When at last the long promenade was ended, the youngsters would be put, not at lessons, but to whipping ruffles or hemming handkerchiefs as they sat in the garden of Mme. Savary's school, overlooking the sleepy river far below the bluff; practicing their French, of course, all the while.[1] A little later came a much more rigorous tuition in the convent of the Sacré Cœur. The teachers here were highly accomplished ladies, models of French breeding and refinement, and they taught Jessie not merely history and literature but a *savoir faire* which she could hardly have acquired so well elsewhere.[2]

Yet *savoir faire* came naturally to the daughter of Senator Benton, who saw so much of the best society of the country in Washington. She was frequently at the White House, for as a little girl she became a great favorite of President Jackson's. She remembered sitting on his knee as he and the Senator talked. She remembered such experiences as a tour of the White House a few minutes before a state dinner began: the long silent rooms bright with candles, the enormous table gleaming with silver, linen, and banked smilax, and at each end of its oval expanse a great salmon, buried in rippling waves of meat jelly. She was a

[1] Jessie Benton Frémont, *Souvenirs.*
[2] *Jessie Benton Frémont MSS.*

bridesmaid at that long-famous wedding of the Russian Minister, Count Bodisco, to one of her schoolmates in the girls' academy in Georgetown, a wedding extraordinary for the disparity of ages—the ugly, kindly count being sixty-one and the blooming bride but sixteen—and for the distinction of the guests. President Van Buren was there; Henry Clay, tall and slender in his black coat, gave the bride away; and the groomsman paired with Jessie was no one else than James Buchanan, who sixteen years later was to contest the Presidency with her husband.[1] It proved, in spite of all predictions, a remarkably happy marriage. At the Benton home, she was familiar with all the leading Democratic statesmen of the day. But society, however enchanting, never quite won her away from books.[2]

> The supreme delight for me was to be found in Washington only, for there was the Congressional Library. While reading was still a little difficult, the books of glorious pictures were mine to pasture in: Audubon's birds, the Louvre Gallery, fine French engravings of many others. Many a noble collection of sculptures and paintings were all freely laid before me on their broad, low rests, where I, sitting entranced, took in visions of art and beauty that must have moulded my thought and life. My father would take me when he walked to the Senate at ten, leave me to the care of kind

[1] Helen Nicolay, *Our Capital*, 221–224.
[2] *Jessie Benton Frémont MSS.*

> Mr. Meehan, the librarian, and at twelve our nurse came for me, often finding me on the broad recessed gallery opening from the center of the library, where I would find in the noble view of the Potomac and its opposite hills, historical Arlington chief, as lovely a picture as any in the books—plus color and life. This was a growing happiness. Year after year that hushed scholarly atmosphere entered into me. As a young girl I was (ex officio) on the purchasing committee of the Senate. My judgment would be asked, and often taken, for French works. Books costing hundreds were in this way open to me—and many others of little cost but great value.

We must thus think of Jessie at seventeen as a young woman already mature, with a training which had made the best of her naturally decisive character and strong mind. She was no unripe and wavering schoolgirl, whose romantic fancy for a young officer would leave her as quickly as it had come. She had a will of her own. She had seen much of the world, and knew men, cities, politics, and literature. Vivacious, keenly interested in life, quick to measure others, strong in her dislikes and still stronger in her likes, with a delightful combination of poise and animation, she felt that her choice had been fixed. The engagement made in the spring was not to be broken in the summer; it was to become marriage in the fall.

Frémont's work on the Des Moines was accomplished as quickly as impatience could desire. He established the course of the river upward from its mouth to the Raccoon Forks, about two hundred miles in all; taking his astronomical observations with great care, sketching all the points of topographical interest, and giving Geyer time to make a botanical survey. He felt the responsibility of the expedition strongly, and its successful conduct marked a new stage in his development. Occasionally the party would steal a half day for recreation; they would leave the Des Moines bottoms, and range into the woods, where deer and wild turkey were abundant. Frémont's health was benefited. But he was especially proud to return to Nicollet with his data, supplementing Nicollet's own survey of the upper portions of the Des Moines, complete and in order.[1]

Just when he was back in Washington, we do not know—probably early in September. Under just what circumstances he and Jessie met again, we do not know. For a time he was very busy completing the maps, for Nicollet's health was now seriously impaired. The map making was the real crown and goal of these expeditions, and had to be done with the greatest care. First the astronomical observations made in the field had to be arranged; then these observations had to be reduced to latitude and longitude; then the map was projected, and the positions as fixed by astronomy laid down upon

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, uncorrected proof sheets.

it; then, from the sketchbooks, there had to be traced the lines of the rivers and lakes, and the contours of the hills.[1] To Frémont it was always fascinating to see his maps approaching final form, and to place on a sheet of paper the results of laborious travel through the uncharted wilderness as a guide for all future wayfarers.

The Bentons were still adamant in their opposition to the match. Sometimes Frémont saw Jessie at her parents' home, sometimes clandestinely. It was the dull season in Washington; as dull, wrote James Gordon Bennett, "as the last season philippics. Pennsylvania Avenue reminds one of the prophet Ezekiel's valley of dry bones. Hardly so much as a dun stirring."[2] The two discussed their position carefully. If they waited for parental approval, they might have to wait ten years, and they were far too impetuous and ardent to face such a prospect. A runaway marriage, they decided, was the only means of securing their happiness. Frémont, with Jessie eagerly awaiting the result, went to several Protestant clergymen of Washington and besought them to perform the ceremony. By now it was well known that Senator Benton was intensely and even wrathfully opposed to the match, and the ministers unanimously answered that while they would be glad to marry the two openly, they would not officiate at a secret wedding. For one reason, Jessie was only seventeen years and five months old. We can

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, proof sheets.
[2] *N. Y. Herald*, Nov. 10, 1841.

imagine her eyes flash over this news. Frémont's Catholic friends in Baltimore would have been glad to come to his aid, but this was unnecessary. A friend of Jessie's, an older woman who had watched the romance with warm interest, interceded for them with Father Van Horseigh of the Catholic church of the city, and he promised to perform the ceremony.[1] On October 19, 1841, they were married. For some time they kept their secret from the Benton family, and we have a curious letter from one of Frémont's frontier associates, F. W. Gody, dated in Washington on November 7, urging him to make a public announcement. Gody wrote Frémont:[2]

> Your letter dated Baltimore I have received in due time, and would not have delayed my answer on this particular occasion for an hour if it had not been for breaking up my camp and leaving for Washington. I have arrived here on Friday morning, and now I hasten to offer you my best congratulations, and beg you to accept my most sincere wishes for your future happiness. Perhaps you have noticed, Mr. Frémont, that I am not very fond of much and big talk, but so much I can assure you, that none of your friends (you have permitted me to class myself amongst them) feel a warmer interest for you than I do, that no one wishes more truly and more cordially that those

[1] *N. Y. Tribune*, June 23, 1856.
[2] *Frémont MSS.* Not to be confused with Alexander Godey.

expectations of a blessed domestic happiness, which you naturally must have formed, may *soon* and continually be realized. I hope you will not think it too great a liberty, when I repeat the word "soon." Although, my dear Mr. Frémont, I cannot judge in this particular case clearly, yet I would venture to say, that any delay of an open declaration, which some time or another must follow, makes your excuse, as well as this declaration itself, much more difficult. Besides, the possibility of an accidental discovery is very strong!—Why don't you go, manly and open as you are, forward and put things by a single step to right—never mind in what this step consists—only act now and you will *soon* get over little disturbances which might arise at first. Nothing very serious *can* happen now more to you—the prize is secured and the rest will soon be smoothed by help of time and mutual affection and love.

If I am mistaken in my suggestion it is for want of information, and then I beg to forgive me. It is friendship that makes me write so. Anyhow, I sympathize with you—and entertain no fears for a fortunate conclusion.

I arrived here on Friday morning, and am perfectly happy in the society of my lovely girl. I don't like it much you beat me so decidedly, but I hope now to follow soon, and then if I should go

out in spring again, I will not have to leave her behind me. I had no time in Baltimore to call on you, beside I did not know your residence altho supposing it to be Bainims.

Mrs. Cummings and Mary desire to be remembered to you and I conclude with the assurance of friendship and personal esteem.

P. S. When walking last night with my Mary and Mrs. Cummings we met Mrs. Frémont. I had a glimpse at her, and thought she looked very well and happy.

Excuse all the blots, neither pen nor ink are good for anything.

Frémont had said that he did not care who performed the marriage ceremony, so long as it was performed quick and sure. Just how many days it took him to pluck up courage to face Senator Benton, and just what the circumstances were, we do not know. But Jessie was with him, and years afterward delighted to tell the story of the sequel to her grandchildren. It was a story of the lieutenant stammering, embarrassed, but determined; of Benton blazing with anger; of sharp commands—"Get out of the house and never cross my door again! Jessie shall stay here!"; and of her own dramatic and defiant intervention, as she clutched Frémont's arm, and silenced the Senator by the words of Ruth: "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and

thy God my God!" Benton knew that she would be as good as her word, and he was not the man to drive his daughter from her home. In the end she stayed, and Frémont, leaving his boarding house forever, came to stay with her.

## CHAPTER VI

## THE STAKES OF THE WEST

FRÉMONT was fortunate in his time. He had completed his preparation for the career of explorer, and had obtained by marriage the support of the American statesman who was most interested in the mapping and colonization of the West, at the beginning of the forties. As it happened, the forties were to be preeminently the decade of American expansion, the decade in which Texas and the Southwest, California and Oregon, were all added to the Union.

The great western wilderness lying beyond the Missouri, though here and there timidly traversed by a few daring travelers, and known in separate regions by roving trappers and fur traders, was for the most part a land of mystery. The eastern public possessed almost no accurate knowledge regarding this land of mountains, plain, canyon, and forest. It had been led by early writers to suppose that a "Great American Desert" lay between the American settlements and Mexican territory. It believed in the existence of mythical rivers: a Rio Buenaventura, supposed to rise in the Rockies and to flow west through an equally fabulous "Lake Salado" to San Francisco Bay; a Rio Timpanagos, supposed to rise in a lake of that name, and also

to flow into the Pacific; and a Rio Los Mongos. It was taught that the regions in which the Buenaventura found its headwaters were a gloomy waste of the most forbidding character. Terrible stories were current of the dangers and mysteries of the icy peaks of the northern Rockies, of the arid sands of the far Southwest, and of the stupendous depths of the Green River and the Colorado River canyons. Reports brought east of the strange Indian tribes, some of them living in substantial stone or brick houses, of the buffalo and grizzly bears, and of the fierce winter blizzards and summer tornadoes, enhanced the atmosphere of wonder surrounding the trans-Missouri country.

By now, to be sure, the list of explorers and travelers in the Far West was beginning to grow long. Lewis and Clark, in their government expedition of 1804-06, the most famous of all, had ascended the Missouri, crossed the Continental Divide, and descended the Columbia River to its mouth. In 1806, Zebulon M. Pike had sought to find the source of the Mississippi, had mistakenly chosen Leech Lake in Minnesota as the spot, and had made some valuable observations in that neighborhood. Later, in 1806-07, Pike had made a reconnaissance from St. Louis to the headwaters of the Arkansas River and, being discovered by a superior Spanish force after he had built a fort on the upper Rio Grande, was forcibly persuaded to accompany the Spaniards as a "guest" by way of Santa Fé and El Paso to Chihuahua. Later he was returned to the United

States through Texas, and becoming a brigadier, fell in the War of 1812. Major Stephen H. Long in 1820 took an expedition from the Platte to the lofty mountain now named Long's Peak, visited the Royal Gorge of the Arkansas River, and returned homeward by way of the valley of the Canadian. The great Platte route was thus clearly opened. A half dozen years later Benjamin Reeves, Major Sibley, and others surveyed and marked out the famous Santa Fé trail from the borders of Missouri to a point beyond the present Dodge City.

Meanwhile, many adventurous fur traders had crept steadily into the Northwest. The enterprising John Jacob Astor had, in 1810, sent a ship around Cape Horn to the mouth of the Columbia, where he had founded Astoria as a western depot for his fur company. The following year, he dispatched an expedition overland to the Missouri, and up that river, to choose the sites for a chain of posts, and had in due time built and officered them. His agents at once began scouring indefatigably the valleys of the Missouri and the Mississippi. The British were equally energetic. Through the Hudson's Bay Company, they had planted a thriving settlement at Fort Garry, now Winnipeg, as early as 1811. The head of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, General William H. Ashley, equipped a party under Jedediah Smith and Thomas Fitzpatrick, which in 1824 traversed the famous South Pass of the Rockies, some eighty miles southwest of the center of Wyoming, and thus opened what a decade later become known as the Ore-

FORT SNELLING IN MINNESOTA

(Fort Snelling, established as Camp Cold Water in 1820 and completed by Col. Josiah Snelling, was the great Northwestern military base when Frémont visited the site of St. Paul in 1838. This later illustration is from Meyer's *Universum*, which Charles A. Dana had published in America.)

gon Trail. The same year found Jedediah Smith trapping in the country around Salt Lake; and this same Smith, one of the greatest rangers of the West, a man of infinite hardihood and daring, twice (1826-28) crossed the desert valleys of Nevada to the coast country of California and Oregon.[1] Both James Bridger and Étienne Provot had trapped in the Salt Lake region before Smith arrived there, and knew it well.

By 1840 there was already a very considerable literature of the West available. Patrick Gass, a soldier with the Lewis and Clark Expedition, who had kept a diary of his experiences, published them in a little volume at Pittsburgh in 1807; and Nicholas Biddle and Paul Allen edited the official journals of the party in 1814. Pike had brought out his rather meager but instructive volume on the Arkansas and the Red Rivers, and the civilization of New Mexico, in 1810. Major Long's *Travels in the Interior of North America,* published in two volumes in 1828, emphasized the desert and inhospitable character of the plains around the upper Platte and Arkansas, thus tending to confirm the views stated by Pike. Such men as Ashley and Jedediah Smith unfortunately had no skill with the pen.

[1] Cardinal Goodwin, *The Trans-Mississippi West,* 126ff, 428ff. The Astor Expedition of 1811 went up the Missouri River as far as the Arikaras, near the present North Dakota-South Dakota boundary, and then struck off westward through Wyoming for the Columbia River. But Astor did not attempt the penetration of Wyoming until 1832. For the Smith-Fitzpatrick Expedition through the South Pass, see Charles L. Camp, "James Clyman, His Diaries and Reminiscences," in the *Quarterly of the California Historical Society,* June, 1925. See also Alter's *Bridger,* 38. The South Pass may have been traversed by Robert Stuart, in John Jacob Astor's employ, as early as 1812. His diary is in the New York Public Library.

But in 1837 Washington Irving touched with immortality the gallant adventures of Captain Benjamin L. E. Bonneville, an officer of the United States Army, who in the spring of 1832, after obtaining two leaves of absence, had headed a private party which set out for the Columbia Valley. Bonneville was of French birth, though a graduate of West Point, and a man of some of Frémont's own daring characteristics. With a well-equipped force of more than a hundred men, he proceeded up the Platte, and over the South Pass of the Rockies into the valley of the Great Salt Lake; while one of his parties proceeded on to California. He was lost to civilization for several years, and when he returned, his name had been struck from the army list; but he brought back the materials for a fascinating narrative, which at once achieved a wide circulation.

Irving's book, *The Rocky Mountains, or Scenes, Incidents, and Adventures in the Far West, Digested from the Journal of Capt. L. E. Bonneville,* first really initiated the literary exploitation of the Far West, and gave a fashionable prominence to trans-Mississippi travels.[1] Irving himself had made a tour of the plains in 1832, traveling from the Mississippi across the Arkansas Valley to a point within a day's march of the Texas boundary, and had written charmingly of the trip in "A Tour on the Prairies," the first and best part of his *Crayon Miscellany.*

More and more attention was being devoted, as the

[1] F. L. Paxson, *History of the American Frontier,* 333.

thirties closed and the forties opened, to the two great western trails, the Oregon Trail and the Santa Fé Trail, and to the possibilities of Oregon, California, and the Far Southwest. The press, led by the enterprising New York *Herald,* printed special correspondence from the frontier. Events in Texas, which was in the full tide of revolt in 1835 and which declared its independence in 1836, did much to kindle the interest of easterners in the trans-Mississippi region. The Alamo was captured, and its garrison, including Davy Crockett, were slaughtered in March, 1836; the following month, Sam Houston crushed Santa Anna's army at San Jacinto. Thereafter, Texas was seldom out of the news or out of the mouths of political-minded Americans. Simultaneously, the Oregon country began to occupy an increasingly prominent place in the American consciousness. Before the thirties it had been merely an utterly remote region, as far distant as Outer Mongolia today, where post traders exchanged blankets and ironware with the Indians for furs, but in this decade it began to be really occupied. Nathaniel J. Wyeth in 1832, with not a little sounding of the drum, had recruited a company in Boston and led it across the continent to Fort Vancouver. His design was to establish a permanent seat of trade, with an overland line of supply, and though the Hudson's Bay Company proved too strong for him, he did advertise the commercial potentialities of the Far West. The Methodists and Presbyterians, burning with zeal to convert the Indians

whom Lewis and Clark had described as possessing such fine qualities of character, sent missionaries in 1834-35 to the Oregon country, and in 1836 Dr. Marcus Whitman and his bride crossed the Rockies by wagon and set up their memorable Waiilatpu Mission near the point where the Walla Walla flows into the Columbia. Meanwhile, in 1832, a steamboat belonging to Astor's fur company had opened the steam navigation of the Missouri as far up as the mouth of the Yellowstone.[1]

At the beginning of the forties, the whole border was alive with activity, and the tide of American emigration was ready to roll westward. The panic of 1837 and the lean years following had paralyzed the expansive energies of the country, and compelled the United States to give its attention to recuperation and restoration. But now depression was giving way to prosperity again. The election of a westerner as President in 1840 seemed to accord with the new impulse of the day.

Yet despite the growing attention to the West and the steady penetration of its more attractive portions, a really scientific knowledge of the trans-Missouri regions was almost completely lacking. Even the expeditions sent out by the Government had not been accompanied by scientists, and had not been productive of genuinely scientific results. The members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition were all simply soldiers

[1] J. C. Bell, *Opening a Highway to the Pacific, 1838–1846*, chs. 3, 4. The Methodists sent four missionaries to the Pacific Northwest in 1834. The Presbyterians sent Marcus Whitman and an associate named Parker in 1835; and Whitman, returning East by land, in the following year went back to the Columbia with four other workers. See W. A. Mowry, *Marcus Whitman*.

and frontiersmen. Each of them was encouraged to keep a record of the trip, and was provided with notebooks in a waterproof cover; and several took pains to write down their experiences. But none of them knew how to map the country accurately, take astronomical observations, set down even the elementary facts regarding botany and geology, or converse with the Indians.[1] Pike's notes of his southwestern expedition were slightly more valuable than the Lewis and Clark *Journals,* but they were unfortunately taken from him by the Spaniards, and were unavailable when he wrote of his experiences. Captain Bonneville took occasional casual astronomical observations to establish his position, but the great value of his memoranda lay simply in the full materials they supplied for the descriptive and narrative talents of Washington Irving.

The only American before Nicollet's time who had definitely accepted the challenge of the trans-Mississippi West to science, and had reared an important reputation by his labors there, was Henry R. Schoolcraft, whose books were well known to Frémont and Benton. A graduate of Union College, where he specialized in chemistry and mineralogy, Schoolcraft had been in Missouri and Arkansas as early as 1818, collecting geological specimens and making a special inquiry into the lead deposits. Two years later, he was en-

[1] R. G. Thwaites, *Brief History of Rocky Mountain Exploration,* 92ff. As the facsimiles published by Thwaites (not by any means complete) indicate, the leader William Clark himself made some excellent maps of the country traversed. Only two full journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, those of John Ordway and Patrick Gass, are known to have been written and preserved.

gaged by General Lewis Cass to accompany Cass's expedition to the upper Mississippi and the Lake Superior copper region, and again he made good use of his geological knowledge. But he found his true field when, in 1823, the Government appointed him Indian agent for the Lake Superior country; and taking up his residence at Mackinac, he began to occupy himself with the study of Indian language and history.[1] In 1832 he joined Lieut. James Allen of the regular army in making the first topographical and hydrographical delineation of the source of the Mississippi.

Everyone who was warmly interested in the West had read Schoolcraft's narratives of his tour to the Ozark district, and his subsequent trip with Cass to what Cass supposed to be the source of the Mississippi; every such person had read his well-written *Travels in the Central Portions of the Mississippi Valley,* and his *Narrative of an Expedition to Itasca Lake.* Frémont and Nicollet had frequently discussed the latter work. Both the vein of poetry in Frémont and his feeling of personal acquaintance with the Minnesota and Dakota plains must have responded with enthusiasm to Schoolcraft's *Algic Researches,* a collection of legends narrated with the simplicity and fresh gusto which always characterized Schoolcraft's style. It was one of these legends, the myth of Hiawatha, upon which Longfellow some fifteen years later was to found his poem. By 1844, too, Americans with a taste for western travels

[1] H. R. Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs.*

were familiar with the beautifully illustrated volume of Prince Maximilian of Wied, who, in 1833, had made a wide tour of the plains.[1]

But none of these works touched upon the crying need for really scientific geographical knowledge of the West, and a thoroughly accurate mapping of the best emigrant routes. This was the need which Nicollet had attempted to satisfy with regard to the higher Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, and the great plateau and lake country between their upper reaches. His careful methods, his incessant observations of latitude and longitude, his topographical sketches of every object of interest, his compilations of geological and biological data, had broken new ground. Nothing of such well-rounded scientific value had been attempted in America before his arrival. Now his health was failing, but in Frémont he left a pupil who could carry his endeavors on.

Benton's interest in the West was primarily political and only secondarily scientific; for the Oregon question was now approaching a crisis, and he, with a little group of western congressmen at his back, was resolved that the Northwest up to the 49th parallel must be American. For more than twenty years, ever since the treaty of 1818 established a joint sovereignty of England and the United States over the Oregon country, this object had been near his heart. From the begin-

[1] See Prince Maximilian of Wied, *Reise Nach Nordamerika*, with engravings and atlas (1838-1843). This was published in London in 1843 under the title of *Travels in the Interior of North America*.

ning of the twenties, he had advocated the systematic occupation of the Oregon valley by settlement. In 1825, he had introduced into the Senate a bill to authorize the President to employ the Army and Navy for the protection of American interests in Oregon—that is, for the establishment of a port to shelter American trading ships and whaling vessels, for the fostering of the fur trade, and for the creation of a safe overland highway to the Columbia. Senator Dickerson of New Jersey, who believed that the Rockies and the inhospitable regions adjoining them would never be good for anything but an Indian Reserve, vehemently objected, declaring that "all the sea-otters we shall ever take upon the coast of Oregon Territory would not pay the expense of marching a single company across the Rocky Mountains." Though many shared this incredible myopic view, Senator Benton persisted year after year.

It was perfectly clear in 1841 that the country was being converted by force of facts to his stand; three years later, one of the northern rallying cries in the presidential campaign of 1844 was to be "Fifty-four forty or fight." The establishment of mission posts in 1835-6 was immediately followed by the emigration of farmers to the new country. This rill of settlement, tiny though it was, was sufficient to demonstrate that the treaty arrangement for a condominium with Great Britain would soon have to be altered, and the definite bounds of American ownership fixed once for all. An inhabited country would need a unitary government.

The moment the issue of eventual American possession arose, it became important to send as many farmers westward as possible, and in 1842 Washington gave official encouragement to emigration by appointing Dr. Elijah White to be Indian agent in that region. White set off for the Northwest coast early that year, with 130 persons and 18 wagons, while other parties, eager for free land in a mild climate, prepared to follow him.

The Oregon Trail, as the one well-established route to the beautiful Columbia River country was known, ran northwest from the town of Independence on the Missouri to near Grand Island on the Platte, and thence turned westward along the Platte Valley to the Rockies, the road being level all the way to a point near the present town of Julesburg, Colorado. From this spot at the fork of the Platte, the country grew hilly; and after the emigrants reached the junction of the Laramie River and the North Platte, they found it mountainous, offering many difficulties to loaded wagons. The ordinary procedure of the Oregon emigrants was to follow the Platte Valley and the Sweetwater River, in a general westward line, to what was known as South Pass, in the southwestern part of present-day Wyoming. After crossing the broad, easy pass, the travelers found themselves in the valley of the Green River, down which they moved to the famous trapping post called Fort Bridger, and thence continued northwest to the Bear and the Snake

at Fort Hall. The tortuous course of the Snake was followed to a point beyond Fort Boisé (which, like Fort Hall, was a post of the Hudson's Bay Company), whence the trail cut across the Blue Mountains to Walla Walla, the Columbia valley, and the goal of the emigrants. Here and there were variations from the established route, like the Sublette cut-off beyond South Pass, which the bolder travelers might take. The whole journey from the Missouri to the Willamette was about 2,000 miles; and of this, 1,000 miles was a rocky, steep, Indian-menaced trail, with fierce alternations of heat and cold, which tested the courage of the emigrants with stern rigor.

The Idaho country beyond South Pass was especially harsh and dangerous, with rapid torrents, an ill-marked route which might easily be lost, and brackish or alkaline streams, whose water men and animals both found repugnant. By 1842, the wayfarer met at every difficult point with signs of the hardships others had suffered: the roughly marked gravestones, the bones of oxen and mules, and the discarded furniture of "movers" who had lightened their wagons. The rocky, sandy route wore out the animals and smashed the wagons. The heavy dust, the burning sun, the thirst, and the long hours exhausted the woman and children. It was a land of sagebrush, hunger, Indian peril, fever, and utter fatigue and discouragement. But every student of the West knew that in 1843 and the following years emigrants would pour along the Trail by

ASTORIA IN OREGON, 1841

(Founded in 1811 by the Pacific Fur Company, a virtual western division of the American Fur Company; occupied by the British in 1813, but surrendered to the United States in 1818. This illustration is from the *Narrative* of Captain Charles Wilkes, U. S. N., 1845.)

thousands. As a matter of fact, within three years after 1842, some 5,000 or 5,500 Americans had settled in the Oregon country.

This Oregon Trail through South Pass did not need exploration in the strict sense of the word; there had been many a "pathfinder" along it before Frémont, and its course was well known. But it was wise to have the route scientifically mapped, to examine the character of the pass and ascertain its latitude and longitude with care, and to report upon the rivers, the fertility of the country, the best positions for forts, and the nature of the mountains which lay beyond the crest of the Rockies in Wyoming. Senator Benton, Senator Linn, and the other "westerners" of their circle discussed the desirability of an expedition which should do for the Trail what Nicollet had done for the Minnesota and Dakota country. It would reassure emigrants by proving the Government's interest in them, and it would advertise the importance of Oregon to the eastern public. In fact, long afterward it was acknowledged that the expedition was "auxiliary and in aid to emigration to the lower Columbia," though it was diplomatically impolitic to make any such statement at the time. Frémont was drawn into these discussions, and found that they "gave shape and solidity to my own crude ideas." [1] All this inherited Gallic fervor thrilled to the idea of empire building. "I felt," he wrote later, "I was being drawn into the current of im-

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*.

portant political events; the object of this expedition was not merely a survey; beyond that was its bearing on the holding of our territory on the Pacific; and the contingencies it involved were large."

As the discussions developed in the closing weeks of 1841, Frémont's sense, not merely of the possibilities opening in the West, but of the possibilities opening in his own career, grew broader and more vivid. He saw a new theater of action before him. But recently an unnoticed lieutenant, his marriage with Jessie had made him a figure known to everybody in Washington; but recently a green assistant to Nicollet, now he was about to step into the shoes of the distinguished Frenchman—in part to reap, quite legitimately, the results of his labors. Nicollet was becoming weaker in both body and nerve, and it was evident that his days of exploration were over.

At the time that Frémont and Jessie decided upon their sudden marriage, Nicollet was lying ill in his old quarters in St. Mary's College in Baltimore, carefully watched over by Bishop Chanche and other members of the Catholic clergy. Here these men of secluded, contemplative lives had welcomed him as the friars of La Rabida welcomed Columbus; they had enjoyed his reports of adventure in the wilderness as much as he enjoyed the security, peace, and orderly comfort of the college. While Frémont completed the map, with all its wealth of explanatory data, Nicollet was laboring from his sick bed upon the report, to be printed

as a government document. It was his ambition to make this report, like the map, a model to be followed by all other explorer-scientists who entered the Government's service. But now he was not only weak but thoroughly dispirited, suffering from a complete nervous exhaustion. He could not muster sufficient energy to prosecute his report, for whatever he set down seemed to him feeble and blemished compared with his ideal of a scientific document. He would lie abed late each morning, and sometimes would not rise all day, doing a little discouraged writing on a pad.[1] Immediately after the runaway wedding, Frémont and Jessie slipped away on the train to Baltimore to visit him, and the sight of their fresh, glowing happiness momentarily revived his spirits. But he relapsed later into his former gloom, and though in intervals of unusual animation and energy he came to Washington and gave as much time as possible to the young couple, whom he fondly called *mes enfants,* his feet were plainly set upon a downward road. He conjured up imaginary obstacles and discouragements in everything he undertook. Every discussion of the plan for mapping the Oregon Trail—an expedition which he knew to be totally beyond his strength—aroused in him a spirit of melancholy.

The plans of the little group of western expansionists came to a head on New Year's Day. It was a happy season of the year for the newly married couple, and Washington society rejoiced with them. In the after-

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs,* proof sheets.

noon, Frémont and Jessie went to pay a visit of ceremony to President Tyler, and accepted their friend Hassler's offer of his large foreign-built carriage, the "ark." In this lumbering vehicle the Frémonts arrived at the White House and alighted, the Lieutenant in uniform, amid the pleased smiles of the crowd. It was a balmy, sunny day, like May; the Executive Mansion had been thrown open to the whole public at noon, and every street leading to it was crowded with carriages, hacks, and cabs. Tyler was busy shaking hands with the great and the obscure, while the Marine Band played delightfully in the vestibule. There was said to be the greatest crush in the White House since President Jackson had exhibited Colonel Meacham's gigantic cheese. Calhoun was there, Winfield Scott blazing with all the insignia of his rank, the Honorable Cost Johnson with the magnificent Lady Blanc on his arm, Webster, looking well and cheerful, and a flock of Democratic senators—Benton, Woodbury, Mouton, and King.[1]

After the call, Jessie returned early to her father's house to assist in receiving guests; there was a family dinner; the tall, kindly Senator Linn came in; and the men withdrew to talk of their plans. Benton was emphatic in saying that Nicollet would never be able to serve again and that the expedition must be in Frémont's charge. He hoped for the immediate passage and approval of an appropriation item.

To obtain a small appropriation—only $30,000 was

[1] *Jessie Benton Frémont MSS.; N. Y. Herald*, Jan. 4, 1842.

granted—was not difficult for men of such parliamentary experience as Benton and Linn, though caution had to be used to avoid exciting opposition. President Harrison, a westerner and an army man, would doubtless have been in favor of all Benton's plans; President Tyler, a southerner and a lawyer, was cautiously averse to any measures for the encouragement of Oregon emigration which might lead to a clash with England. His secretary of war, John C. Spencer, of New York, was a rigid anti-expansionist, who later resigned from the Cabinet because of his distaste for the acquisition of Texas.

## CHAPTER VII

# THE FIRST EXPEDITION: PREPARATION

PROBABLY there was no happier young man in all the country on May 2, 1842, than John C. Frémont. We can imagine him taking leave of his bride of six months in the Benton home; kissing Mrs. Benton; receiving a final pompous, fatherly admonition from the Senator; and, spruce in his blue and gold uniform, running down the steps in the hot spring sunshine to the carriage that was to take him to the railway station. He was but twenty-nine years old. Yet he was at last in full command of his own expedition, with a long summer of glorious outdoor life and adventure ahead of him, and an opportunity to achieve distinction as an explorer of the West. The poor, ragged little half-orphan of the Charleston streets, the youth brought into the backdoor of the Army through Secretary Poinsett's influence, had achieved a position that any West Pointer of wealthy family might envy: the son-in-law of Senator Benton, the husband of the most vivacious and charming girl in the capital, the successor of the famous Nicollet.

Had he been able to foresee what a delightful and profitable expedition lay before him, his feeling of joy and elation would have been heightened. Frémont,

within the next decade, was to pass through harrowing experiences of physical hardship and mental anguish; but this first independent tour of the West included no day that he could not remember with pleasure. It was a summer's tour only, made in the kindliest of weather. It was not too ambitious in its objectives: he went only as far as the South Pass and the Wind River Mountains, and penetrated no very dangerous country. It was full of exciting incidents; of contacts with Indians, buffalo, and frontiersmen, of adventures on plain, mountain precipice, and river rapids, which called every faculty into play. At the end, there were not only the congratulations of his chief, Colonel J. J. Abert, the pride of Senator Benton, and the bliss of reunion with Jessie, but a public interest and recognition which surpassed his fondest hopes.

It took twenty days for the Lieutenant, who was accompanied by Jessie's brother Randolph, a high-spirited lad, to reach St. Louis; and those who are curious as to the method of his travel may find a full description in the works of a young man, not much older than Frémont himself, who traveled substantially the same route this same spring—Charles Dickens. Both went from Washington to St. Louis, and there can be no doubt that in essentials, if not in details, they used the same means. First there were the "cars" to Baltimore, and then a steamboat to Philadelphia. The Harrisburg mail coach, huge, lumbering, and crowded, with Frémont's bulky and carefully watched baggage on top,

took him up the beautiful valley of the Susquehanna, and into the town of Harrisburg. Here there was a canal boat waiting, where Frémont, like Dickens, could have "sat down to tea, coffee, bread, butter, salmon, shad, liver, steak, potatoes, pickles, ham, chops, black puddings, and sausages." As they crossed the Alleghenies they began to meet rough western types of humanity like the frontiersman Dickens heard protesting against a crowded boat cabin: "This may suit *you,* it may, but it don't suit *me* . . . I'm a brown forester, I am. I ain't a Johnny Cake. There are no smooth skins where I live. We're rough men there. Rather. If Down Easters and men of Boston raising like this, I'm glad of it, but I'm none of that raising nor of that breed. No. This company wants a little fixing, it does."

From Pittsburgh to Cincinnati, the travelers had their choice of a crowd of high-pressure steamboats, where tiny staterooms gave them some privacy, and they could sit in a narrow gallery outside and gaze upon the changing green shores of the Ohio. They were very crude affairs, these steamboats, with two high iron chimneys and a glassed-in steering-cabin atop, a mass of ill-built staterooms, and two cabins, one for men and one for women, below, and underneath everything the hickory-fed furnace and the machinery, open to every wind. Dickens, seeing the furnace fire "that rages and roars beneath the frail pile of painted wood," the machinery working away in the midst of a crowd of

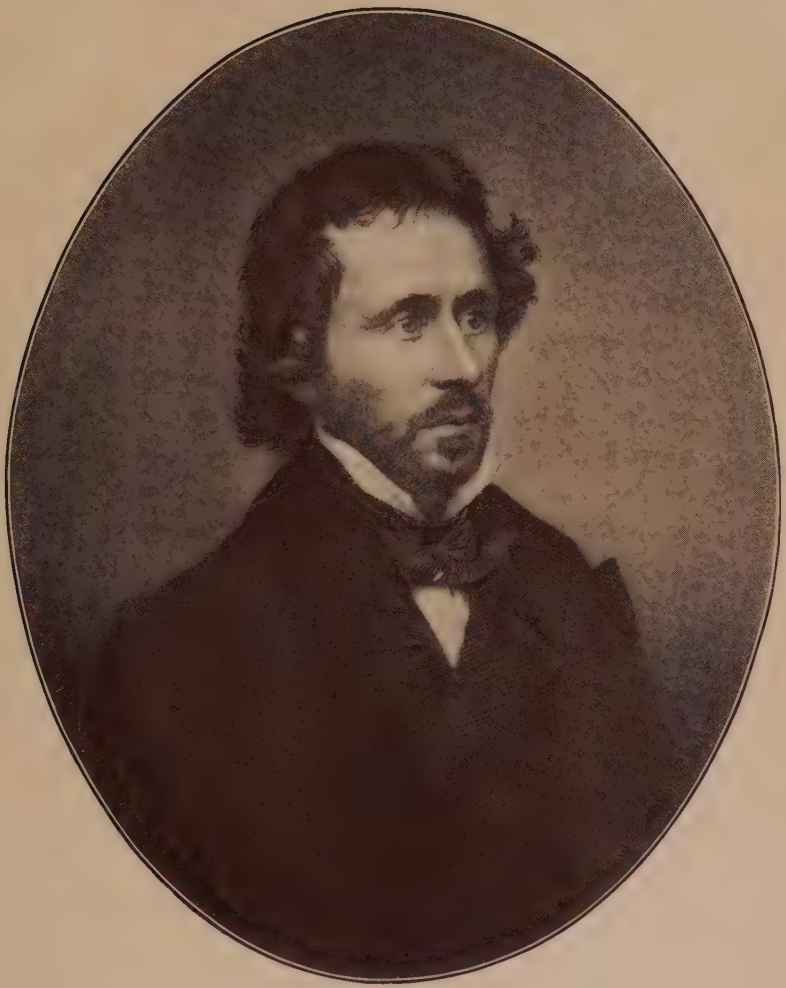
idlers, emigrants, and children, and the whole management of the boat entrusted to reckless, inexperienced men, concluded that the wonder was, not that there should be so many fatal accidents, but so many safe journeys.[1]

From the point where the Ohio began to broaden into a noble river, Frémont could feel that he was again entering the wilderness; for while they passed an occasional town or hamlet, the banks were for the most part a deep and leafy solitude, with no clearings, no thread of smoke from a log cabin, no life but the flash of the blue jay or tanager. Only here and there could he see wheat coming up green amid the unsightly stumps of a new farm, and the lanky settler leaning on his ax and gazing curiously at the steamboat as it throbbed past. Here and there, too, the steamer landed a little group—a man in workman's clothes, a woman in calico, a few children, and some old chairs and cooking utensils—to begin their pioneering venture. Sometimes at night, after gliding for hours through the silent darkness, they would come suddenly to a spot where men were "burning off," and the tall trees stood sharply defined in the deep red glow of the fires of brush and logs. At Cincinnati, they found a beautiful city, with well-paved streets, clean, freshly painted houses, shops that would do credit to New York, and a suburb, Mount Auburn, on the high bluffs above the city and the river, where pretty villas stood in well-

[1] Charles Dickens, *American Notes*, Ch. 11.

kept gardens. Here Frémont, like Dickens, probably took a larger and better steamboat, a mail packet, and once more the wilderness closed around him.

To those who made such a journey in 1842, the tide of western travel seemed mounting to a torrent. The boats were crowded with land speculators, talking of fortunes in the new Illinois and Iowa townships; surveyors; Louisville and Cincinnati drummers; an occasional hunter and trapper, conspicuous in leathern garments and coonskin cap; frontiersmen who had found their old homes too crowded and were seeking new; and, above all, a motley throng, mechanics from the East, Englishmen with capital, Irishmen without, and guttural Germans, hunting cheap land and free opportunities. Their talk was of the West—of the great new Mormon community growing up at Nauvoo, Illinois; of the big money which Kentuckians were making by taking droves of mules and horses to market through Cumberland Gap; of the latest lynching in Arkansas or Missouri; of the work the Government was doing for the Chicago harbor, and the huge lake trade; of the new river cities, like Hannibal, Quincy, and Keokuk; and of the trade the Magoffin brothers were carrying on with caravans of goods to Santa Fé. Some of them were talking of the Missouri trading posts and the Oregon country. The curiosity of the emigrants when the Ohio boat reached the Mississippi was intense. The enormous stream, a mile wide, sometimes two or three, pouring its muddy flood lazily southward, rolling whole



Frémont the Explorer
(From a daguerreotype by Brady after the second expedition.)

forest trees along in its strong, frothy current, their tangled roots sometimes coming dangerously near the steamboat's sides; dotted with lumber rafts, with old-fashioned arks, with hay boats, keelboats filled with flour and bacon, and with skiffs; the steaming marshes; the far-away vistas of forest opened up by an occasional creek—all this produced an irresistible impression of power and wildness.

Frémont's imagination must have responded to it. He knew that every turnpike, every canal and lake route from East to West was contributing its share to the growing volume of emigrant travel. He recalled Benton's prediction that within a century the population west of the Rockies would exceed the whole population of the Republic as it was in 1820.[1] And here he was, the *avant courier* and path marker for this human stream which was so rapidly remaking America!

Reaching St. Louis, Frémont was received as a guest at one of its finest mansions—the home of Mrs. Sarah Benton Brant, Mrs. Benton's favorite niece and the wife of an old friend and army officer.[2] Here he had something more than a room—he had an introduction to the best St. Louis society, curious to see Colonel Benton's son-in-law. The house of Chouteau was more cordial than ever, and Cyprian Chouteau gave his entire time to Frémont's needs. By June 10, all preparations for the expedition were complete.

Since the personnel and equipment of this party were

[1] T. H. Benton, *Register of Debates*, I, 712.
[2] Frémont, *Memoirs*, proof sheets.

to a considerable extent the model for Frémont's later ventures, we may examine them in some detail. Frémont was commander and chief scientist; his staunch friend Preuss was topographer and sketcher; a frontiersman named Lucien Maxwell was hunter. Henry Brant, the nineteen-year-old son of Frémont's host, was taken along as general aide. In addition to these and the boy Randolph, there were nineteen voyageurs, most of them French Creoles of long experience in the fur trade. All were well armed, and all but eight were mounted on excellent horses. These eight were drivers of as many mule carts, in which the party packed its baggage, instruments, and food. A few loose horses and four oxen for slaughtering completed the train. What the party lacked was a westerner of thorough experience with the plains and mountains to serve as guide. At first, Frémont thought of employing the mountaineer Andrew Drips, who had spent much time in the Rockies for the Amercian Fur Company, and Pierre Chouteau wrote to Drips in Frémont's behalf;[1] but, as fate would have it, a much better man became unexpectedly available. A rare stroke of luck threw two of the most picturesque figures of the West together at the outset of their careers.

As Frémont, his work in St. Louis completed, was ascending the Missouri by steamboat to Chouteau's Post, or Kansas Landing, near the present site of Kansas City, his attention was drawn to a rugged and

[1] Pierre Chouteau, *Maffitt MSS.*, Collection D, Missouri Historical Society.

tanned westerner of medium height, with broad shoulders and deep chest, whose look of grit and shrewdness and frank address made an instant impression. The man was introduced as Kit Carson. At once the two were drawn to each other, partly because they were so largely opposites. Both were of southern origin, Carson having been born of North Carolina and Kentucky stock. Carson as clearly betrayed his Scotch-Irish ancestry as Frémont did his French blood. He was cool, quiet, observant, determined; the ideal complement of the quick, sensitive, passionate, indomitable Frémont. Both were young men, Carson being thirty-three; but Carson, who was a widower and a father—in fact, he had visited St. Louis in order to place his young daughter in a Catholic school—was much the more mature. Both might be called highly educated, but in very different senses.

A true child of the frontier, Carson had been reared amid surroundings which gave him no opportunity for book learning, and as yet was unable to read or write his own name. His speech was the speech of the illiterate southern frontiersman; he had "fout" the "Injuns" out "thar"; he had seen more than one "pore young-un massacreed"; but he "lowed" that with a good shootin' iron he wasn't "afeared nohow." Born the same year as Lincoln, in Madison County, Kentucky, not far from Lincoln's birthplace, he had been taken by his parents to the Missouri border when only a year old, and brought up in poverty. Apprenticed at fifteen to a rough backwoods saddler, he had seized the first oppor-

tunity to run off for the wild free life of the border, and had joined a wagon train down the Santa Fé Trail. His longing for adventure was not satisfied by even this dangerous trip, and instead of returning from Santa Fé with his companions, he had pressed on up into the mountains of New Mexico, and taken refuge with a trapper and hunter named Kincaid, who made his home in Taos. Thenceforward Taos, the picturesque old Mexican-Indian resort of mountain men and traders some seventy-five miles northeast of Santa Fé, where a fertile valley watered by a sparkling stream projects into the Taos Mountains, was Kit Carson's real home.[1]

As the years passed, Carson had extended his activities as guide, trapper, and hunter until few men knew the great western country so well, or could be trusted so fully to meet every contingency of wilderness life. His first spurs were won by participation in a daring expedition. Joining the trapping party of Ewing Young, he had crossed the desert into upper Arizona, gone on westward to Los Angeles, and then, turning north, had traversed California to the Sacramento River, there lingering for some time. As we shall see, this acquaintance with the interior of California was later to serve Frémont well. Carson then became a trapper in the service of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, and a number of years before he met Frémont had carried a

[1] It should be added that Kit Carson lived with his family on a farm fifty miles east of Taos in 1844–45, and on the Maxwell ranch, not far distant, in 1849–53; and that in 1868 he removed from the Taos district to Boggsville, near what is now La Junta, Colorado.

zigzag line through the Rocky Mountains northward from Taos almost to the Canadian boundary. In making this remarkable trip with a small body of companions, he first struck into the interior of Colorado, then went on up across the Colorado line, crossed the Continental Divide at South Pass, and, continuing through western Wyoming, finally reached the Salmon River in northern Idaho, where he and his mates spent the winter with the friendly Nez Percé Indians. Thereafter, under one employ or another, Carson was found in successive years at widely scattered points in the West, his trails making an intricate network. He was in the Three Forks country of the sources of the Missouri; he was in the valley of the Green River; he joined an expedition down the Mary's River of northwestern Nevada; he was at Fort Hall on the Snake River; he wintered with the famous Jim Bridger upon the Yellowstone. Incessantly moving, incessantly observant, he was storing up an unequaled fund of information upon all parts of the West, from the Gila to the Columbia, the Sacramento to the Platte.

In character and temper, Carson was just the man to appeal to Frémont. He was candid, outspoken, genial, temperate in his habits, and quiet and modest in his deportment. Unlike many brawling sons of the frontier, he was averse to contentions and disorder, and never entered a quarrel when he could avoid it. His life seems to have afforded just one notable instance of a personal encounter. He happened, on the Green

River, to meet a herculean bully named Shunar, who had threatened his life, and he quietly rode up to Shunar to ask if he was looking for anybody. Shunar treacherously answered no, but at the same time lifted his rifle to his shoulder with the muzzle not four feet from Carson's heart; instantly Carson brought his cocked pistol into play, shooting from the belt at the arm of the bully, and shattering his wrist just in time to deflect the charge from the rifle, which scorched Carson's forehead. Of this exploit he was accustomed sometimes to speak with unassuming pride.[1] Carson was known all over the frontier for his high sense of honor, his loyalty to friends, and his unselfishness. "With me," said Frémont in a letter of 1847, "Carson and Truth mean the same thing. He is always the same —gallant and disinterested."

To suppose that because he had no formal schooling Carson was not a cultivated man is to make a serious error. His natural abilities were superior, and he had made the utmost use of his opportunities for learning what is not given in books. He spoke more languages than Frémont. Not only did he have a fluent command of French, Spanish, and several Indian tongues, but he could carry on an easy conversation with unfamiliar tribes by signs. No one was more skilled in Indian customs, ways, and manners of thought, and no one knew more about woodcraft. His sagacity, caution, and quickness of intuition were proverbial. Place him

[1] Cf. E. L. Sabin, *Kit Carson Days*, 165, 166, for varying versions of this story.

in a situation of imminent danger from Indians, wild beasts, or prairie fire, and he would instantly devise the best means of extricating himself. Once, on the headwaters of the Platte, his party lost nine horses, spirited away by a thievish band of Crow Indians, and Carson with a dozen men was sent in pursuit. Stealing at night upon the Indian encampment, they succeeded in leading the horses off while the Indians slept. The majority of the party favored immediate flight with their recovered property, for they would have a start of several hours. But Carson grasped the elements of the situation and demurred: the horses were exhausted; they would certainly be followed; the Indians outnumbered them three to one and could surround them at pleasure, and they would be shot down from ambush without mercy. Their proper course was to attack the savages. In the battle which followed, Carson's men, profiting by surprise, won an easy victory. We have from a fellow adventurer an account of the scout's instinctive manifestation of caution while in hostile country:[1]

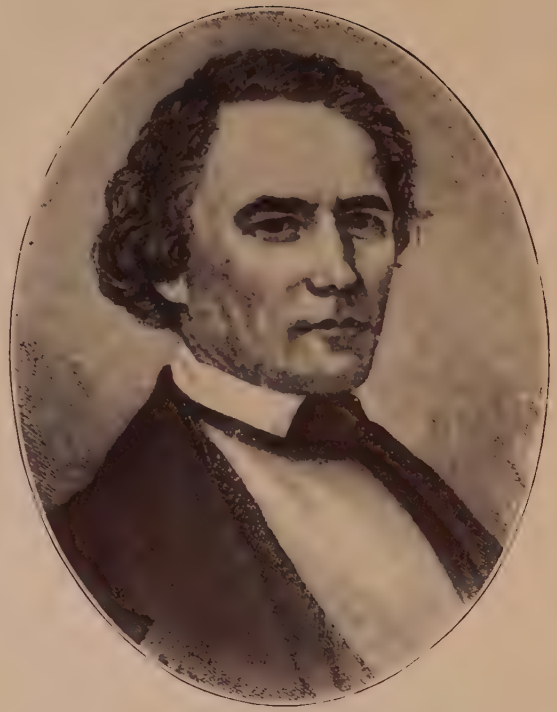
> During this journey I have often watched Carson's preparation for the night. A braver man than Kit perhaps never lived. In fact, I doubt if he ever knew what fear was. But with all this he exercised great caution. While arranging his bed, his saddle, which he always used as a pillow,

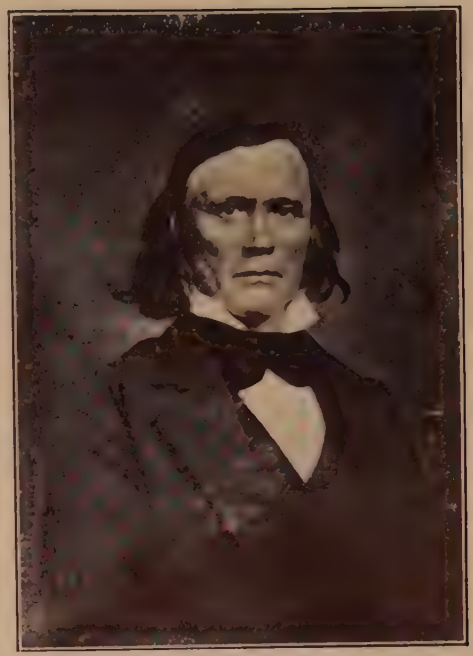
[1] J. S. C. Abbott, *Kit Carson*, 37, 38, quoting Lieut. G. Douglas Brewerton in *Harper's Magazine*, August, 1853—his article a fine piece of narrative and descriptive writing.

> was disposed in such a manner as to form a barricade for his head. His pistols, half cocked, were placed above it, and his trusty rifle reposed beneath the blanket by his side, where it was not only ready for instant use, but perfectly protected from the damp. Except now and then to light his pipe, you never caught Kit at night exposing himself to the full glare of the camp fire.

Though Carson's biographer expresses surprise that a trapper and hunter who was doing so well at Taos and Bent's Fort should accept service with Frémont,[1] the reasons are not hard to fathom. Frémont offered him $100 a month. Carson was in the mood for a roving summer trip, for his visit to St. Louis had left him restless. He had spent only ten days in the city, for though he was eagerly curious regarding the sights of the town, the noise and heat wearied him; "for many consecutive years," he said later, "I never slept under the roof of a house, or gazed upon the face of a white woman." He longed again for the open. The connection formed on the little Missouri steamboat struggling upstream in the bright June sunshine of 1842 was to last until Carson's death in 1868, and through two expeditions was to be the happiest of partnerships. Carson was able to tell the Senate six years later that he "was under more obligations to Frémont than to any other man alive." Until now, his name had seldom

[1] Sabin, *Kit Carson Days*, 208.





Two Portraits of Kit Carson

(The portrait on the right is from the Meserve Collection, and shows Carson about 1860; that on the left is from Frémont's "Memoirs" and depicts him about 1840.)

appeared in print, and never in an official report; but his labors with Frémont were to make him well-known in the East. Both Frémont and Jessie always made Carson an honored guest in their home when he visited civilization.

At the Cyprian Chouteau post, where the last preparations were made, Carson hurried two Delaware runners off down the Santa Fé Trail to Taos, with instructions for about fifteen of his own men to meet him, with equipment, at Fort Laramie. The final parcel was placed in the carts. On Friday, June 10, the column lengthened out from the belt of woods bordering the Kansas, past several well-kept Indian farms, and on to the open prairie. The routine of the march was at once established, and, as it was typical of later expeditions, we may glance at it in some detail.

Frémont and Carson designed their discipline primarily, like all emigrant trains, freight caravans, and trapping bands, to give them constant protection against a surprise attack. They did not wait till dusk to camp, but chose a suitable spot a good hour, or sometimes two hours, before sunset. By sunset they had the carts wheeled into a compact circle. Within this effective barricade the tents were pitched, with a merry din of stake driving; saddles, blankets, and eating utensils were thrown down; four fires were kindled and kettles slung for as many different messes; and a homelike scene soon presented itself. Meanwhile, the horses and mules had been hobbled and turned

loose, under a guard, to graze. While it was yet broad daylight, men ate supper, and the fires were let die down so that they would throw no dangerous illumination over the camp. When darkness fell, the animals were driven close to the wagons and picketed by a twenty- or thirty-foot halter, which permitted them to get a little grass. Camp guard was mounted at eight, and the three sentries were relieved every two hours, the last or morning watch constituting the horse guard for the day.

By nine o'clock, the tired men were usually wrapped in slumber; by half past four, they were aroused. The horses and mules were again turned loose with hobbles, breakfast was eaten, and by six-thirty they were on the march again. At noon, they would halt for one, or sometimes two, hours, more to rest the animals than the men. Such was the regular daily procedure, disturbed only by accident or unexpected physical obstacles. A stormy night was at first their chief hardship, for it meant sleeping in muddy puddles. Twenty-eight miles over the open prairie seems to have been regarded as "a hard day's march," and twenty-four miles was more usual.

The provisions of the camp were substantial and not altogether Spartanly simple. The men did not set out without sugar, and great were the lamentations of one of the messes when, in crossing the swollen Kansas at the usual ford, it lost its sweets in the muddy water. Greater still was the regret of the whole expedition when, at

the same crossing, almost all its coffee disappeared under the swirling current.[1] They purchased some twenty pounds from a half-breed, but this did not go far. Later, they fell back upon a kind of tea made from the roots of the wild cherry. On the early stages of their march, they were able to buy from the Indians vegetables—pumpkins, onions, beans, and lettuce. Later, when they came up with the far-spreading herds of buffalo, the men were jubilant over the supply of tender meat. Shouts and songs resounded from every part of the line, and the evening camp fires signaled the beginnings of a feast which ended only with the break-up of the encampment the following morning; at any time of the night, men might be seen roasting the choicest bits—the hump, the tenderloin, the tongue, the sirloin steaks—*en appolas* (that is, on sticks) over the fire. There was never any scarcity of tobacco, and at first there was enough bread, but later it became a coveted luxury. Of course the garb of the men, as the journey lengthened, grew steadily more ragged and outlandish. A dozen days out, they met a party of trappers coming from a long sojourn in the interior; "we laughed then at their forlorn and vagabond appearance," says Frémont, "and in our turn, a month or two afterward, furnished the same occasion for merriment to others."

Frémont himself was busy from morning to midnight. He maintained discipline with an iron hand under a glove of unvarying tact. He occupied himself

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 75.

every evening and noon, when the weather permitted, in taking astronomical observations. He carefully observed the botanical and geological features of the country, and kept a daily journal of great detail. The map of the expedition was kept complete from day to day, and Preuss was assigned the task of sketching any scene or position of unusual importance. At various halts, the men were trained in firing at a mark and in repelling attacks.[1]

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 78 ff.

## CHAPTER VIII

# TO THE SOUTH PASS AND FRÉMONT'S PEAK

THIS first expedition, thus captained by Frémont and guided by Carson, was absent from June 15, 1842, the date when they left the ford of the Kansas, until October 1, when, marching down the Missouri, the men heard the cowbells at break of day on the first border farms. In this period of three and a half months, it accomplished all the objects expected by the Government, and more. Frémont first proceeded up the Kansas River Valley, to observe its general character, and then crossed to the Platte, which he followed into the foothills of the Rockies. It was a great moment when, on July 9, they caught their first glimpse of the snowy summit of Long's Peak. The next day, they halted at St. Vrain's Fort, immediately under the Rockies, and were received by Colonel Ceran St. Vrain himself with warm hospitality. Struggling up the valley of the Sweetwater, the party, on August 8, reached the principal objective of its march, the South Pass. This, as Frémont was surprised to find, in spite of all that Carson had told him, was not an abrupt break in the mountain wall, but a broad opening reached by such a gradual ascent that he had difficulty in fixing the precise point where the Continental Divide lay, and the waters

flowing east parted from those flowing to the Pacific. There was no gorge, like the Allegheny gaps or Alpine passes. Instead, a wide sandy road lifted by a slow and regular grade to the summit, about 7,000 feet above the sea.

The party, now 950 miles from the mouth of the Kansas, continued its march to the headwaters of the Green River, which flows into the Colorado. This reached, Frémont set out to explore the Wind River chain, a magnificent group of snow-capped mountains, the highest in Wyoming, which rose before them, pile upon pile, their icy caps glittering in the bright light of the August day.

The great spectacular feat of the expedition—and its leader always delighted in the spectacular—was the ascent of what Frémont considered the highest peak of the central Rockies, Frémont's Peak, which is 13,730 feet high. Actually, one other summit in the Wind River chain, Gannett Peak, five miles north, is some fifty or sixty feet higher, while in Colorado there are almost thirty peaks of 14,000 feet or more. Nor is Frémont's Peak a mountain difficult of access or dangerous to the climber. Frémont and his five companions set out early on the morning of August 15; they found themselves, after some rough climbing, riding along a nearly perpendicular wall of granite, terminating from two to three thousand feet above their heads in a serrated line of broken, jagged cones. At what Frémont believed the best point, they undertook to mount this

wall, climbing leisurely. Three little lakes of a dark emerald, apparently very deep, lay in a chasm below them. Above the snow line, they had to use very light, thin moccasins of buffalo skin, and at one point Frémont worked his way across a vertical precipice by clinging to the crevices; but from the ledge thus gained it was an easy matter to reach the crest.

"I sprung upon the summit," says Frémont, "and another step would have precipitated me into an immense snow field five hundred feet below. To the edge of this field was a sheer icy precipice; and then, with a gradual fall, the field sloped off for about a mile until it struck the foot of another ridge." Though the day was sunny and bright, a slight shining mist below obscured the view over the surrounding country. Nevertheless, the prospect was inspiring. On one side, to the west, they descried a vast shining network of lakes and streams, the waters from which fed the Colorado; and on the other side, the deep-forested trough of the Wind River Valley, with the faint gleam here and there of streams which flowed into the Yellowstone and down to the Missouri. Far northwestward, bright in the haze, they could pick out the snowy peaks of the Three Tetons, which marked the sources of the Snake and the Columbia. Frémont's chest expanded as he surveyed this immense landscape. Fixing a ramrod in the gneiss of the summit, he unfurled a special flag, carrying the regulation thirteen stripes, but bearing in the corner a white field with a blue eagle perched upon an

Indian pipe of peace, and blue stars.[1] They lingered till midafternoon, when they returned to their cache of dried coffee and meat at the foot of the peak, and slept that night on the rocks.

The principal adventure met by the party occurred on its return. Frémont's orders were to survey the Platte, and it was his plan to hasten home by making as much use of the waterways as possible. While still on the Sweetwater, he had his men inflate the collapsible rubber boat which he had brought from the East, and load it with the necessary instruments and equipment. The shallowness of the stream made progress impossible, and they took to the land again. But when the Platte was reached, they found it flowing broad and deep, swollen beyond its usual size. Frémont therefore divided his party. The larger group he directed to proceed across country on foot till it reached a point named Goat Island, an unmistakable mark; while with Preuss and five others, he provisioned the rubber boat for a dozen days, and began the descent by water. After a few hours, a hollow roar announced that a series of falls was before them. Frémont stopped, reconnoitered, and then, thinking of the heavy labor of unloading his apparatus and other baggage, determined with reckless impetuosity to run the rapids.

One series of little cataracts was traversed successfully, the elastic boat bending to every shock. Another steeper and more gloomy canyon lay just ahead, but

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 151, 152.

emboldened by their previous success they decided to risk its descent also. Everything was tied securely; the men threw off most of their clothing, and they pushed into the stream. To save the valuable chronometer, Preuss took it and attempted to walk along the stream on the masses of rock which were piled up on either side, but shortly found that the shore disappeared and the walls fell vertically into the torrent. He therefore desisted and clambered back into the boat, which moved swifter and swifter.

At once it became plain that their position was perilous. They had attached a rope about fifty feet long to the stern of the boat, and three of the men had been left to clamber along the rocks with it, trying to lessen the boat's velocity. All in vain; for a few hundred feet everything went well, and then they realized their Bucephalus was too much for them. "To go back was impossible; the torrent before us was a sheet of foam; and, shut up in the chasm by the rocks, which in some places seemed almost to meet overhead, the roar of the waters was deafening." The force of the torrent became such that the men on shore could no longer withstand it. Two of them loosed their hold, but the third hung on an instant too long, and was jerked, head foremost, from a twelve-foot ledge into the boiling water. The boat shot downstream like an arrow, this unfortunate voyageur—Basil Lajeunesse by name—being carried down after it in the rapid waters and putting forth all his brawn as a swimmer to keep from being

dashed against the rocky shore. From the boat, his head could be seen at momentary intervals as a black spot bobbing in the foam. Fortunately, the craft was soon brought into an eddy below and held stationary long enough to allow the half-drowned Frenchman to be dragged over its gunwale, cursing. Then, after catching breath, they went on, and in another moment disaster had overtaken them.[1]

> We cleared rock after rock, and shot past fall after fall, our little boat seeming to play with the cataract. We became flushed with success and familiar with the danger; and, yielding to the excitement of the occasion, broke forth together into a Canadian boat-song. Singing, or rather shouting, we dashed along; and were, I believe, in the midst of a chorus when the boat struck a concealed rock immediately at the foot of the fall, which whirled her over in an instant. Three of my men could not swim, and my first feeling was to assist them, and save some of our effects; but a sharp concussion or two convinced me that I had not yet saved myself. A few strokes brought me into an eddy, and I landed on a pile of rocks on the left side. Looking around, I saw that Preuss had gained the same shore on the same side, about twenty yards below; and a little climbing and swimming soon brought him to my side. On the oppo-

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 157.

> site side, against the wall, lay the boat, bottom up; and Lambert was in the act of saving Descoteaux, whom he had grasped by the hair, and who could not swim. . . . For a hundred yards below, the current was covered with floating books and boxes, bales of blankets, and scattered articles of clothing; and so strong and boiling was the stream that even our heavy instruments, which were all in cases, kept on the surface, and the sextant, circle, and the long black box of the telescope were in view at once.

Yet the party extricated itself better than it might have expected. The boat was righted, and taken downstream a mile and a half, where a broad expanse of fallen rocks offered a resting place. For this distance, the banks and shallows were searched, and much of the baggage was recovered. One of the voyageurs had clung to Frémont's double-barreled gun. All the registers were recovered, with the exception of one of Frémont's journals, containing his notes upon the incidents of travel, topographical descriptions, some scattered astronomical observations, and the barometrical register west of Laramie. Happily, there were duplicates of his most important barometrical observations in the other journals. The circle was saved, and a number of blankets. But all the heavier articles—the sextant, telescope, and remaining guns—had sunk beyond recovery; the party was left stripped of every morsel of food, ammunition, and arms, at the mercy of sav-

ages and in danger of starvation. It was urgently necessary to push on at once and join hands with the men who had gone by land to Goat Island.

The battered boat had to be left behind, for the rocky pass was too narrow to allow it egress from the canyon; while the recovered baggage was deposited in a safe spot and left. Climbing slowly to the top of the canyon, the half-naked explorers hurried forward over the rocky ground. Frémont hobbled along on one moccasin, his unprotected foot cut by sharp rocks and filled with cactus thorns. The party had to cross the winding river repeatedly, sometimes fording it and sometimes swimming, and to climb the ridges of two more canyons before, late in the evening, almost exhausted, they came within sight of Goat Island. A shout from the foremost man showed them that the land expedition was just ahead; and soon they were sitting about a hot fire, eating pieces of buffalo steak roasted at the coals, and telling the story of their adventures.

This catastrophe was a forcible lesson upon the folly of such precipitate leaps in the dark as Frémont had just taken. His impetuosity might have destroyed completely the records of his expedition and given a disastrous check to his career; it might have cost several lives, and, if the junction with the other members of the expedition had failed, would certainly have done so. But this instance of rashness, though characteristic of the man, was not typical of his work as leader.

On the whole, Frémont in this expedition showed

coolness and sagacity; and it is pleasant to record an incident which gave him opportunity to demonstrate his resourcefulness in an emergency. This incident occurred as they were just entering the Wind River Range. In crossing a broad stream, pouring rapidly over a slippery bed of boulders and quartz slabs, where the pack animals fell repeatedly, the horse bearing the barometer struck it against a rock and broke it. It was the only barometer the expedition owned. Since it was indispensable for an accurate measurement of the height of the peaks, its loss seemed a tragic blow. They had brought it a thousand miles, watching over it with anxious solicitude day and night, and now, just as they reached the high Rockies, it was smashed. The men were as dejected as Frémont himself. But they had no sooner made camp than he set about trying to repair the catastrophe.

Frémont found that while the glass cistern had been broken about midway, no air had found its way into the tube. He had a number of vials of rather thick glass, some of them of the same diameter as the cistern, and, with a rough file from the tool chest, he spent the day slowly endeavoring to cut them to the requisite length. Unfortunately, they all broke. Next morning, having placed the barometer at night out of harm's way in a groove in one of the trees, he began to work upon a different device. Taking a powderhorn which happened to be remarkably translucent, he boiled it, stretched it on a piece of wood to the requisite diameter,

and scraped it very thin, until it was almost as clear as glass. Then using some strong glue made from a buffalo's tendons, he fastened the horn firmly in its place on the instrument, and filled it with mercury, properly heated. A piece of skin, secured with thread and glue, furnished a suitable pocket, and the brass cover was screwed into place. After the instrument had been left for some hours to dry, Frémont and his companions anxiously tested it. When it was reversed, they had the joy of finding it in perfect order, its indications being almost identical with those it had marked just before it was broken. The day was saved, and they uttered a unanimous exclamation of joy.[1]

Frémont also early proved his ability to secure a firm hold upon the affection and confidence of his men. When the expedition reached Fort Laramie, on the road out, it met alarming news. This fort, strongly built of adobe and wooden palisades, was maintained by the American Fur Company for its traders and for the protection of emigrants along the Oregon Trail. It happened that the famous frontiersman, Jim Bridger, had just come down the North Platte trail with a company of traders. He brought word that the Sioux, Blackfeet, and Cheyenne were all combined and on the warpath, thirsting for the blood of white men, and that the route from Laramie to South Pass was very perilous. This news was received with alarm by the voyageurs under Frémont, and even Carson was so

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 141.

St. Charles, Missouri

(Founded in 1769, and the first capital of Missouri. Near here Captain Sutter for a time had a farm.)

much affected that he made an oral will, which trappers seldom did save in extremity.

Yet Frémont, though Carson believed that the party would almost certainly have a clash if they pushed forward, did not hesitate. Both traders and Indians advised him to wait until time had been given the war parties to complete their raids and return home; but he knew that to stop was in fact almost impossible. It was he who had insisted that the orders for the expedition include South Pass, and in all honor he had to go thither. A main purpose of the reconnaissance was to determine the best points to plant forts for protection against Indians, and it would never do to refuse to face the Indians in the field. There was an Oregon caravan just ahead of Frémont, and if it was in trouble his duty was to follow at once.[1] Moreover, Frémont well knew with what sneers and gibes he would be greeted in the East by West Point men if he returned confessing that an Indian scare had forced him to abbreviate his plans. He was a newcomer in the Army, and very decidedly upon his mettle before the critical officers of long standing in the regular establishment. They would never cease reminding him that he had allowed a trail—a settler's trail at that—to be closed in his face.

As a measure of precaution, Frémont wisely engaged an interpreter, one of the fur traders of the region, named Bissonette, who, if they came in contact with

[1] Cf. Dellenbaugh, *Frémont and '49*, 71.

the Indians, would be able to explain that the purposes of the expedition were purely scientific. Bissonette had himself told Frémont that the chief danger would lie in being attacked before the savages knew who they really were. Then, the equipment having been repaired and everything being ready for a start, the young leader called his men about him at evening and told them he was determined to push forward at dawn the next day; that they were well armed and accustomed to the country; and that they had known on the Missouri that the Indians were restless, and ought not to complain of the peril. However, he wanted no undependable followers, and those who had no stomach for the risk might drop out. A few days before, the voyageurs had been explaining: "Il n'y aura pas de vie pour nous."[1] Yet now only one man had the face to come forward and accept the permission to retreat, and Frémont, after asking some question to expose him to the ridicule of the others, let him go.

The two youths, Randolph Benton and Henry Brant, were reluctantly left at the fort—the "petit garçon" Randolph in particular had become, through his high spirits and cheerfulness, a general favorite—for it was unjustifiable to risk their lives. As it turned out, the party sighted few Indians on the Sweetwater Trail, and none hostile enough to contest their passage.

Kit Carson's task of piloting the expedition was finished when it turned back from the Wind River Range,

[1] Frémont, *Report, First Expedition*, 52.

and he did not complete the circuit with Frémont. The party of trappers and hunters for which he had sent to Taos did not actually join the explorers. They were not engaged as part of Frémont's company; they had to hunt and trap somewhere, and Carson simply wished to have them near him in the event of trouble with the Indians. They left Taos late in June with laden pack horses, and pushed northeast up the Indian trail to Fort Laramie; passing through Pueblo, then a Mexican village of a few adobe houses, past the site of the present city of Colorado Springs, over the site of Denver, then a virgin wilderness without even a hut or a tent, and on to their destination. Keeping near Frémont on the Sweetwater, they crossed to the western side of the Rockies, and were there joined by Kit Carson at a spot thirty miles from the Atlantic and Pacific Springs.[1] With Carson as leader, they then returned to Taos with their pelts for the winter. But before the separation took place, Frémont and Carson had agreed that the latter was to act as guide for a second expedition the next year, 1843.

The final stages of Frémont's return trip exhibited both his tenacity and his skillful use of such experience as he had gained with Nicollet and Sibley. Even after the wreck of the rubber boat he did not surrender his wish to descend the Platte by water. There was little wood, but he did not need it. Several buffalo bulls

[1] Sabin, *Kit Carson Days*, 216. These springs, though both near the summit of South Pass, are of course not together.

were killed and skinned; the four best hides were sewn together with buffalo sinews, and this tough fabric was stretched over a framework of river willows. Then the seams were caulked with a glue made of ashes and tallow, and the vessel was left in the hot sun till the drying skins drew taut. The result was a broad shallow "bull boat," such as trappers often used, eight feet long and almost wide enough for a man to lie down in. It drew, when Frémont, Preuss, and two others took up the paddles, only four inches. Unfortunately, the Platte did not offer four inches. For three or four miles the men tugged and pushed their ungainly craft over sandy shallows, and finally in discouragement left it on a sand bar. They continued afoot, and on September 18 reached Grand Island; four days later, they bought some green vegetables from friendly Pawnees engaged in harvesting their gardens. On September 30, they reached the Missouri; and on October 1, Frémont, rising long before daybreak, heard with a feeling of inexpressible pleasure the mellow tinkle of cowbells from farms on the opposite side of the river. He was back on the border of civilization.

## CHAPTER IX

## A LITERARY ACHIEVEMENT

LINGERING in St. Louis for only a day or two to sell what remained of his equipment, Frémont hurried East and was in Washington on October 17, 1842. He had special reason for haste. A few days after he arrived, Jessie gave birth to their first child, a girl. Spreading over her bed a ragged, wind-whipped flag, he said proudly: "This flag was raised over the highest peak of the Rocky Mountains. I have brought it to you." [1]

Those would have been happy days in the Benton mansion, with the new baby, the young husband home tanned and rugged, the wife radiant, but for one shadow which had fallen on the household. Mrs. Benton, shortly after Frémont's departure, had suffered a stroke of paralysis. Jessie believed that it had been brought on by her mother's insistence upon outworn methods of medical practice, for Mrs. Benton still believed in bleeding, and, despite the Senator's opposition, would have a vein opened even when she had nothing worse than a sick headache. When Frémont arrived home, the aged lady was an emaciated wreck, who could talk only slowly and imperfectly, and whose mind had plainly

[1] *Jessie Benton Frémont MSS.*

been impaired. In that devoted family circle, the event was a deep shock. Senator Benton, wrote Jessie later, would come in buoyantly every day, impressed by the doctor's command that he remain cheerful, would keep up appearances for a time, and would then bolt to his room to give way to an overpowering grief. His incessant care of the invalid was touching to watch. The story is told that, at a later date, the Senator was receiving some visitors of political importance when his wife appeared at the door, in *déshabillé* and with her faculties clearly wandering. He hesitated not an instant, but with all his characteristic dignity hastened to her, brought her to his guests, and introduced her with an air of pride. Family loyalty and affection were always a mainspring of Benton's character, and Frémont now saw them exercised as never before.

For the explorer himself, there was no time for a vacation. He was already discussing with Senator Benton a plan for a second and longer expedition to the Pacific Coast; and if he was to start in the spring, as he hoped, he would have to hurry through his report. Both men wished to make this a document of literary quality, which would be widely and eagerly read. Frémont, remembering the interest excited by Irving's *Captain Bonneville,* planned a narrative of equal verve and color. He and Preuss would also have to prepare a general map of the country covered, and at Benton's suggestion they decided to make it a guidebook in atlas form; that is, a series of maps in great detail

representing each a day's journey toward the Oregon country. Such a guidebook, with the camping places which afforded grass, water, and wood clearly indicated, would be invaluable to emigrants. Many hundreds of specimens in botany and zoölogy had to be arranged and classified, and for this, expert help was needed; Frémont was fortunate in obtaining the aid of the botanist, John Torrey, who undertook a description of the plants collected.

At once Frémont found that his training had not fitted him to wield the pen with the effectiveness needed. He had a natural command of graphic English, and even documents which he later produced under great hardship or stress, such as his long letter[1] to Jessie from Taos when he had just emerged from the wreck of his fourth expedition, show a remarkable force and lucidity. But he lacked elegance, and he found that he did not command the vividness and the imaginative quality requisite if he was to rival *Captain Bonneville.* In the effort to begin his report, he spent some days of mental and physical anguish. Jessie tells what happened in her own tactful way.[2] "The horseback life, the sleep in the open air, had unfitted Mr. Frémont for the indoor work of writing—and second lieutenants cannot indulge in secretaries. After a series of hemorrhages from the nose and head had convinced him he must give up trying to write his report, I was let to try, and thus slid into my most happy life work."

[1] Bigelow, *Frémont,* 365 ff.
[2] *Jessie Benton Frémont MSS.*

This work, done during the mornings in the Benton home on C Street, was not an easy task. Jessie took her place at the desk daily at nine, and never left it till one, writing like mad to follow her husband's dictation. She taught Frémont to take his notes and construct a narrative which satisfied every curious question which occurred to her, while her acquaintance with the best English literature frequently suggested a form of expression superior to his own. It was a true collaboration of two quick and sympathetic minds. Frémont paced the room as he talked. "I soon learned," writes Jessie, "that I could not make a restless motion; it was hard, but that was lost in the great joy of being so useful to him, and so, swiftly, the report of the first expedition was written." Then followed the proof correction, which she also mastered, "and behold! Mr. Frémont's first book." It was a little brochure of some 120 duodecimo pages, but of a value and interest which made Frémont's reputation.

Its most engaging quality was the zest, the frank ardent enjoyment of adventure and danger, which its glowing passages reflected. Frémont, with Jessie's curiosity to spur him on, felt no false inhibitions. He showed that the romance, the peril, and the novelty of the trip had been to him the very wine of life. Where a professional soldier would have been pedantic and matter-of-fact, he was eloquent. He recalled with a thrill the first alarm which ran through the party, when some distant elk were taken for Indians. "Mounted

on a fine horse, without a saddle, and scouring bareheaded over the prairie, Kit was one of the finest pictures of a horseman I have ever seen." He put a contagious excitement into his description of the chase: "My horse was a trained hunter, famous in the West under the name of Proveau; and, with his eyes flashing and the foam flying from his mouth, sprang on after the cow like a tiger." There was something glorious to him in the first glimpse of a buffalo herd:

> In the sight of such a mass of life, the traveler feels a strange emotion of grandeur. We had heard from a distance a dull and confused murmuring, and, when we came in view of their dark masses, there was not one among us who did not feel his heart beat quicker. It was the early part of the day, when the herds were feeding; and everywhere they were in motion. Here and there a huge old bull was rolling in the grass, and clouds of dust rose in the air from various parts of the bands, each the scene of some obstinate fight. Indians and buffalo were the poetry and life of the prairie, and our camp was full of their exhilaration.

What an imaginative sentence, this last one, for an official report! Parkman, later, might have felt proud of it. But there were numerous passages which showed this poetic and imaginative ardor. One in his picture of an Indian buffalo hunt:

> The clouds of dust soon covered the whole scene, preventing us from having any but an occasional view . . . We were too far to hear the report of the guns, or any sound; and at every instant, through the clouds of dust, which the sun made luminous, we could see for a moment two or three buffalo dashing along, and close behind them an Indian with his long spear, or other weapon, and instantly again they disappeared. The apparent silence, and the dimly seen figures flitting by with such rapidity, gave it a kind of dreamy effect, and seemed more like a picture than a scene of real life.

Another, even better, is the fine bit which gives us a glimpse of the knightly quality of the young Frémont as he rode on his westward quest. He had reached a village of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe:

> As we rode along, I remarked near some of the lodges a kind of tripod frame, formed of three slender poles of birch, scraped very clean, to which were affixed the shield and spear, with some other weapons of a chief. All were scrupulously clean, the spearhead was burnished bright, and the shield white and stainless. It reminded me of the days of feudal chivalry; and when, as I rode by, I yielded to the passing impulse, and touched one of the spotless shields with the muzzle of my gun, I almost expected a grim warrior to start from the lodge and resent my challenge.

Frémont's Men Among the Buffalo
(From Frémont's "Memoirs." Chicago, 1887.)

Frémont's quick sense of natural beauty, which remained with him throughout life, lends its constant charm to these pages. He was pleased by the sunflowers which yellowed the Kansas prairies, and the carpets of smaller flowers in the river bottoms farther west. The Platte at the point where it issues from the Black Hills,[1] with overhanging precipices of red sandstone crowned by green summits, three or four hundred feet above the stream, seemed to him of a striking and romantic beauty. But it was the Alpine magnificence of the Wind River chain over which he waxed most enthusiastic. The morning of August 10 found the party encamped on a little stream, a tributary of the Green River, which ran swiftly over a bed of granite, milky quartz, and sand. Just in front rose a mountain wall 2,000 feet in height, the bottom wrapped in morning fog, and the top gilded by the first rays of the sun. Farther in the distance lay the dim forms of high peaks. Suddenly, as the sun shot above the wall, there came a magical change. The whole valley, with its green pines, foaming stream, and many-colored rocks, glowed with a rich warmth, while the mountain peaks rose above it like domes and pinnacles of silver.[2] They took up their march, traversing long ridges of granite-strewn ground, and after wind-

[1] Frémont's "Black Hills," like Parkman's, were the Laramie Mountains of Wyoming.

[2] John C. Frémont, *The Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains, Oregon and California* (George H. Derby & Co., Buffalo, 1849), p. 89. This volume will hereafter be cited simply as Frémont, *Report*, but it will be noted whether it is the first or second expedition (bound together and paged continuously in this edition) which is being reported. The edition is selected as being that preserved in the Frémont papers, and also as being the one most commonly found in libraries.

ing up a long gorge, came upon a delightful lake set like a jewel in the mountains. "Here," says Frémont, " a view of the utmost magnificence and grandeur burst upon our eyes. With nothing between us and their feet to lessen the effect of the whole height, a grand bed of snow-capped mountains rose before us, pile upon pile, glowing in the bright light of the August day. Immediately below them lay the lake, between two ridges, covered with dark pines which swept down from the main chain to the spot where we stood. Here, where the lake glittered in the open sunlight, its banks of yellow sand and the light foliage of aspen groves contrasted well with the gloomy pines." He immediately planted his base camp here.

But it was the informational element, of course, which bulked largest in the report. For the first time all that the general public wished to know about the Oregon Trail to the Rockies, over which thousands were preparing to set out, was laid before the country. Soil, climate, geology, vegetation, animal life, the Indians, were interestingly discussed. The same informality marked the treatment. No human touch was omitted. Thus Frémont mentioned some Yankee trappers on the Platte. "All had their squaws with them, and I was really surprised at the number of little fat, buffalo-fed Indian boys that were tumbling about the camp, all apparently of the same age, about three or four years old." He spoke of "tobacco, that *sine qua non* of a voyageur."

He described a supper of dog meat in an Indian village:[1]

> The dog was in a large pot over the fire, in the middle of the lodge, and immediately on arrival was dished up in large wooden bowls, one of which was handed to each. The flesh appeared very glutinous, with something of the flavor and appearance of mutton. Feeling something move behind me, I looked round, and found that I had taken my seat among a litter of fat young puppies. Had I been nice in such matters, the prejudices of civilization might have interfered with my tranquillity; but fortunately, I am not of delicate nerves, and continued quietly to enjoy and empty my platter.

Forts St. Vrain and Laramie were succinctly described; the operations of the fur trade were analyzed, with some sympathy for the Indians ruined by the liquor traffic. At Fort Laramie, Frémont found that the traders of the American Fur Company annually received great piles of buffalo robes which they stacked up like cordwood, giving the savages in exchange blankets, calico, guns, ammunition, tobacco, cheap gewgaws, and drink. The general policy of the Company was firmly opposed to the introduction of spirits. But at a time when the country was supplied with alcohol, when a keg of it would purchase from an Indian his furs, his lodge, his horses, and even his wife, and when any

[1] Frémont, *Report, First Expedition*, 59, 60.

vagabond who owned a mule could go to an Indian village and out-trade the company, it was impossible for the Company to avoid wholly the use of liquor. Unlicensed traders sold their liquor at $36 a gallon. "The difference between the regular trader and the *coureur des bois* (as the French call the itinerant or peddling trader) with respect to the sale of spirits, is here, as it has always been, fixed and permanent, and growing out of the nature of their trade. The regular trader looks ahead and has an interest in the preservation of the Indians . . . ; the *coureur des bois* has no permanent interest, and gets what he can, and for what he can." [1] Frémont mentions a plague of locusts which had destroyed the grass west of Laramie; he describes the Indian process of jerking buffalo meat. Even in speaking of the top of Frémont Peak he added a humanizing touch:

> Here, on the summit, where the stillness was absolute, unbroken by any sound, and solitude complete, we thought ourselves beyond the region of animated life; but while we were sitting on the rock, a solitary bee (*bromus,* the humble-bee) came winging his flight from the eastern valley, and lit on the knee of one of the men. It was a strange place, the icy rock and the highest peak of the Rocky Mountains, for a lover of warm sunshine and flowers; and we pleased ourselves with the idea that he was the first of his species to cross the moun-

[1] Frémont, *Report, First Expedition,* 55.

tain barrier—a solitary pioneer to foretell the advance of civilization.

Unquestionably the most important single lesson taught by the report was its demonstration that the plains between the Missouri and the foothills of the Rockies were not arid but fertile—that the Great American Desert had no existence in this region. Frémont showed that there was nutritious grass for horses and other live stock; that for some hundreds of miles the country was highly attractive in its alternations of woodland and prairie; and that the Platte Valley was rich. There had been no scientific report upon this strip since Major Stephen Long's army expedition of 1820, and Long's observations had been superficial and unfavorable. Writing of the country he traversed in a circuit of the Platte, the Rocky Mountain foothills, and the Arkansas, he had said: "I do not hesitate in giving the opinion, that it is almost wholly unfit for cultivation, and of course uninhabitable by a people depending on agriculture for their subsistence." This of what are now the great farming states of Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma! Frémont's report was the first sharp sword-thrust at the popular delusion that an American Sahara lay in regions which are now the very granary of the United States—a delusion, however, that was to persist till the gold rush of '49 and the annexation of Mexico finally slew it.

Frémont's success was of immediate importance to

the expansionist senators. During 1842, some one hundred and twenty emigrants, spurred on by newspaper accounts of Oregon, had made the long pilgrimage from Missouri to the Columbia Valley. The Burnett and Applegate families of Missouri, well-known to Benton, were among the leaders of this concourse. Yet President Polk continued to favor a policy of delay, though to the anxious western congressmen it seemed that delay was simply playing into the hands of Great Britain. The President's annual message of December, 1842, suggested that it would be improper to grant any titles of land to Oregon emigrants until "the respective claims of the two governments should be settled." At the same time, the Administration, then preparing for the discussion of the Ashburton Treaty regarding the northeast boundary, sounded out the Missouri senators upon a suggestion, emanating from the negotiators of the Treaty, for a "conventional division line," to run along the north bank of the Columbia; thus surrendering most of what is now the state of Washington to the British. The resentment of the western group in Congress was instant. Senator Linn, taking the leadership against the President, introduced a bill which he and Benton believed would promote the flow of settlers. It provided that the President should erect a series of forts along the Oregon route to the Rockies, and one at the mouth of the Columbia; that every adult settler should be given 640 acres of Oregon land, with an additional quarter section for his wife and every

child; and that an administration of justice be set up in the Oregon country, leaving British offenders to British jurisdiction. Calhoun and McDuffie of South Carolina led the opposition to the bill, which passed the Senate 24 to 22, and was then stifled in the House. But the effect Benton and Linn intended was fully accomplished.[1] The impression was established that a large and growing portion of Congress was ready to give support to those who entered Oregon, and that colonization of the far-off region was a patriotic duty. Benton declared he looked forward to the day when we should have "thirty or forty thousand rifles beyond the Rocky Mountains" as our "negotiators."

While the Senate debate on Oregon was proceeding, Frémont put the finishing touches to his report and filed it with the War Department. Senators Benton and Linn were waiting to give it due advertisement. A motion was passed calling upon the Secretary of War to transmit the report to the Senate, and Linn then offered a resolution that it be printed for Congress, with 1,000 extra copies for public distribution.[2] He made a brief speech, praising Frémont generously and summarizing the work of the expedition. The printing was ordered and the report was no sooner in type than the newspapers seized upon it.

[1] Thomas Hart Benton, *Thirty Years' View (From 1820 to 1850)*, II, 477.
[2] *Congressional Globe*, March 3, 1843.

## CHAPTER X

## THE SECOND EXPEDITION: A FAMILY MUTINY

WITH Benton's and Linn's advice, Frémont's second expedition had been so planned as to promise a fresh impetus to the now fast-swelling Oregon tide. His ostensible object was to connect his explorations of the previous year with the surveys which Commander Wilkes—whose report to the Government attracted great attention—had been making along the Pacific coast. With this in view, he was to approach the South Pass by a different route, push on west, and examine the broad regions south of the Columbia, lying between the Rockies, the Pacific Ocean, and the Spanish possessions in California. His work, it was hoped, would furnish a connected scientific description of the Far Northwest, dispel the belief that the Oregon journey was terrifyingly difficult, and show that the Columbia Valley was safe and attractive.

Congress broke up at the beginning of March, 1843, and the Frémont-Benton household broke up with it. The Senator hurried west to St. Louis alone. Frémont went to New York with the expert Preuss to buy his instruments, and then by rail and steamboat to Missouri. For Jessie, her mother, and the baby, a private stage—an "accommodation," it was called—was pro-

vided, and packed with comforts. They set out over the National Road, moving slowly with many stops for rest; and taking the boat at Wheeling, reached St. Louis in about a fortnight.[1] All were reunited at the Brant mansion, but only briefly, Benton setting out to mend his political fences, and Frémont, after hiring some voyageurs and buying some mules, going on to Kaw Landing, the site of what is now Kansas City, to make his final preparations. He was at this point by the middle of May, 1843.

Never had an expedition, private or governmental, been better fitted out than this second body equipped by Frémont on the Missouri. He had thirty-nine men, not counting supernumeraries, all well armed with Hall's carbines and pistols. Six of them were voyageurs who had been with him on his first expedition, including Basil Lajeunesse, always ready, active, and a great favorite. One was Jacob Dodson, a free negro of eighteen, who was devoted to the Benton family, and whose black visage excited great curiosity among the Indians. For guide—Carson did not join them till they reached Pueblo in what is now Colorado—Frémont engaged Thomas Fitzpatrick, called "the Bad Hand," one of the most experienced trappers and hunters of the Rocky Mountain region. He also hired his old friend Louis Zindel, the former Prussian soldier who had been with Nicollet and who knew so much about artillery

[1] *Jessie Benton Frémont MSS.*

and rockets. Two upstanding Delaware Indians, father and son, were taken along as hunters.

The party had a dozen large carts, each drawn by two mules, and a light covered wagon for the scientific instruments. These instruments were Frémont's special pride. They included a fine refracting telescope, two pocket chronometers, two sextants, a reflecting circle, a syphon barometer, and a cistern barometer, half a dozen thermometers, and an assortment of compasses. Packed with the tents was a large supply of gifts for friendly Indians, and a rubber boat, not so well made as the one taken on the first expedition. Their stock of provisions included an abundance of flour, rice, sugar, and coffee, while for meat they depended upon game.[1] Most important of all, in one regard, was a twelve-pound howitzer cannon. Frémont had applied to Colonel S. W. Kearny, commanding at St. Louis, for this piece, saying he "expected to be much among Indians who had for many years a known character for audacious bravery and treachery." Perhaps Zindel had suggested taking it, perhaps Benton. Cannon were not unknown as weapons against Indians, for General William H. Ashley had fitted a supply train with a four-pounder, and Jedediah Smith, on the last trip of his life, had taken one. But the general feeling of frontiersmen was that they were worse than useless.[2] It is likely that Frémont was thinking of the possibility

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 17 ff.
[2] Dellenbaugh, *Frémont and '49*, 104, 107.

that he would have to overawe unfriendly British or Mexican officers. It is interesting to note that the Colonel Kearny who supplied the gun was the officer with whom Frémont, three years later, engaged in one of the bitterest contests of his life.

Kaw Landing in these May days of 1843 was a busy place. Crowds of men, including 1,200 emigrants to Oregon or California, fur traders, trappers, freighters down the Santa Fé Trail, were there, and hundreds more were coming.[1] The facilities of the little settlement were taxed to the utmost. Long lines of horses and mules, switching their tails against the flies, stood eating grain out of rough troughs made by tying sacking to lines of stakes. The swearing of teamsters, the shouts of roustabouts, the bellowing of oxen, made the steep sides of the bluff echo. Baggage was piled high on the shore. Every few days a steamboat pulled in with a hoarse musical roar, or dropped downstream. Amid the bustle, Frémont's men scurried about, seeking the aid of a blacksmith here, loading goods into the carts there, making purchases in the stores which, crude and small, were doing a business that many a pretentious eastern shop might envy. We can imagine the bristly blond head of Preuss bobbing everywhere, the white locks of Fitzpatrick—whose hair had suddenly turned gray when, beset by Blackfeet in the mountains, he had lost every companion and had been hunted among the rocks for three days—streaming in the wind. While

[1] Theodore Talbot, *MS. Journal*, Library of Congress.

they were thus busy, suddenly Frémont received from his wife a letter which urged him to set out for the West immediately. It gave no reason, but declared that haste was imperative, and commanded him to go on to Bent's Fort instantly.

Frémont knew that there was good reason for this urgency. It was only eleven days since he had reached the little town at the mouth of the Kansas, but he gave the word, and next morning the teamsters cracked their whips over the straining mules, while the leader galloped ahead with Fitzpatrick and Preuss. They proceeded only four miles over the rolling prairie, for a nasty rain was falling, and some of the green animals were balky; but when they camped they were safely out of sight of the village.

The sending and reception of this peremptory message of Jessie's is an incident which reveals much in her character and Frémont's. She was so much his aide that he had asked her to open all mail and forward only what related to the expedition. One day there came a long official envelope marked "Topographical Corps," and something told her to read it. She dropped it to her lap in consternation. It was an order directing Frémont to return at once to Washington and to explain why he had taken a cannon. It was to be a peaceful scientific survey, wrote Colonel Abert, and not a trip requiring a howitzer. Meanwhile, another officer

would be sent to take charge of his men. Jessie instantly blazed up. She writes:[1]

> Fancy his fine picked men, "every man a captain in himself," as Carson once said to me, under the line-and-rule control of an ordinary officer. But here intuition came to my aid. Behind the chief of that Bureau [Colonel Abert], who was a placid, indolent man, I saw his son-in-law who was an envious, discontented person. I ought to say here that the Report had given immediate fame to Mr. Frémont—then why not the same to another officer?
>
> I felt the whole situation in a flash, and met it—as *I* saw right. I had been too much a part of the whole plan for the expeditions to put them in peril now—and I alone could act. Fortunately my father was off in the State attending to his political affairs. I did what I have always since been glad to remember. First I told no one. I knew that one of the men engaged, a French Canadian named De Rosier, had been permitted to remain in St. Louis on account of his wife's health, gaining for her the month the party were at Kaw Landing with Mr. Frémont. Now I sent for De Rosier.

Mrs. Frémont was probably mistaken in attributing the order to jealousy. The Washington authorities simply objected to giving a scientific expedition the

[1] *Jessie Benton Frémont MSS.*

appearance of a military reconnaissance. Our relations with Great Britain and Mexico being highly delicate, it was improper to march with a cannon into debatable or foreign territory. That cannon, in the hands of the impulsive Frémont, might start an international conflagration. But Mrs. Frémont gave De Rosier his orders.

> I told him an important letter had come for the Captain, and I wanted it delivered without loss of time. I had to send him, for I thought he would not return. "How long will you need to get ready?" "The time to get my horse." "Say nothing of this, De Rosier," I said, "but you going up by land know how to cut off the bends in the river, and can save the time the mail boat will have to lose lying at anchor by night on account of the river fogs." He suggested taking a brother along—"two horses travel together better, and he will bring back a letter from the Captain." You see I was afraid the order had been sent in duplicate, and might, even with the detentions from fogs and snags, yet overtake Mr. Frémont. It was in the blessed day before telegrams, and character counted for something then, and I was only eighteen, an age when one takes risks willingly. It was about 400 miles to Kaw Landing as the crow flies. So I wrote urging him not to lose a day but start at once on my letter. . . .
>
> In a marvelously short time De Rosier's brother

Two Pictures of Mrs. Frémont

(The miniature was painted about 1845, was carried by Frémont in the Far West, and was buried with him in 1890; the photograph was reproduced in Frémont's "Memoirs," and shows Mrs. Frémont in Pocaho days.)

was back with the letter. "Good-bye," said my captain. "I trust, and GO." Nothing was asked.

If Colonel Abert felt any resentment, it was never expressed. Doubtless he thought it best, since Frémont was beyond recall, to accept the facts and not to arouse the antagonism of Senators Benton and Linn. He did not reply to either Jessie or her father. To her dying day, Mrs. Frémont took pride in her quick and decisive action. Unquestionably it was justified if, as she always believed, the Washington authorities meant to make Frémont's recall final, and to turn over the expedition to another officer. There was just one unfortunate consequence of the affair. It lent strength to the view among professional army men that Frémont, headstrong and impulsive, failed to appreciate the value of discipline or unquestioning obedience. It placed a blemish of insubordination upon his conduct. When later he came into conflict with other officers upon an issue of obedience to his superiors, the episode was remembered to his discredit; and nobody remembered it more clearly than the commander in St. Louis, in this year 1843, Colonel Stephen W. Kearny.

Fully to understand Mrs. Frémont's defiance of the War Department, we must remember that she had been the confidante of Benton and Frémont; that she had listened to their discussions with Linn, Sevier of Arkansas, Smith of Indiana, Young of Illinois, and other expansionist senators; and that she understood their belief that "manifest destiny" would make California and

Oregon part of the United States. She knew what hopes her father pinned to her husband's expedition as a means of furthering the acquisition of the Pacific Coast. She was aware that Frémont meant to enter, not merely Oregon, but California. As she stated long afterward, she saw that his recall "would make delays which would involve the overthrow of great plans." [1]

Once she had Frémont's announcement of his start, she wrote Colonel Abert telling him what she had done. She declared that the orders had been made out upon a partial knowledge of the facts; that Frémont's party needed to be well armed to pass through the hostile Blackfeet and other tribes; and that she had therefore suppressed them. When Senator Benton returned from the interior of the state, Jessie states that he wrote Abert "that he took my place, and would be responsible for my act." [2] In fact, Benton did more than this. He himself relates that he was outraged when he heard of the attempt to countermand what proved an important step toward gaining California. He wrote a letter to the War Department, he says, "condemning the recall, repulsing the reprimand which had been lavished upon Frémont, and demanding a court-martial for him when he should return." No doubt it was a characteristically fiery, pompous letter. Benton thought with Jessie that the jealousy of West Point men was the real motive. In short, the Benton family carried out an effective mutiny against the Government.

[1] *Century Magazine*, Vol. 19, New Series, 767.
[2] *Jessie Benton Frémont MSS.*

## CHAPTER XI

## WEST TO THE OREGON: 1843

THUS started prematurely, the expedition waited on the prairies one day—May 30, 1843—while its members rode back to the settlement for the missing parts of their equipment; then, on the 31st, the journey was resumed, in company with several emigrant wagons. These wagons were bound to the Sacramento, and were filled with provisions, furniture, and farm implements, including the complete machinery for a mill which J. B. Chiles planned to erect on that river. There was no question now as to the vigor and scope of the westward movement. As the expedition moved outward along the Santa Fé Trail, Frémont saw trains of wagons far to the front, and others stretching irregularly to the rear, giving the road a well-used and animated appearance. On the fourth night out, the great missionary, Dr. Marcus Whitman, camped with the party.[1] The majority of the season's emigrants had already reached or passed the point where the Santa Fé Trail intersected the Kansas River; but still the stream of late-comers for Oregon and California showed no sign of slackening. The clouds of dust, the gleam of the canvas-topped wagons, were to the exuberant Frémont a proof that

[1] Talbot, *MS. Journal*, Library of Congress.

his leadership was needed immediately. His own party included two "passengers" for the coast, Theodore Talbot of Washington and Frederick Dwight of Springfield, Massachusetts, the latter having China as his ultimate destination.

The labors and adventures of the second expedition between the Missouri and the Dalles of the Columbia, occupying the period between June 1 and November 5, 1843, may be very briefly summarized. Frémont at once deviated southward from the route of his first trip, hoping thereby to find a new road to the coast through a country of more genial climate. His plan was, instead of following the Platte to the South Pass in southern Wyoming, to go up the Kansas River to the head of the Arkansas River, in what is now central Colorado, and to try to discover a new pass through the mountains, far to the south of that which most emigrants were using. If he could have discovered such a corridor as that which railway builders later utilized up the Gunnison Valley into Utah, and proved it suitable for emigrant use, he would have greatly benefited the country. He was not destined to succeed in this attempt. He was, however, to bring his party through many new scenes to Oregon and California.

Following the northernmost fork of the Kansas River westward, the expedition found itself at first in an arid, unproductive country, where the broad shallow stream, some 600 yards wide and only a few inches deep, seemed to struggle for its life among yellowish-white quick-

sands. Crossing this fork, the Republican, toward the northwest, they pushed on over a terrain more and more broken and elevated. They suffered greatly from thirst, and had to drink the half-putrid water of buffalo wallows.[1] On the afternoon of July 1, when already 4,000 feet above sea level, they caught a far glimpse of a faint blue mass pencilled against the glowing sky, a mass behind which the sun disappeared. In the clear morning air next day, they could see Long's Peak and the high neighboring mountains, still covered to their bases with gleaming snow.[2] On July 4, they arrived at St. Vrain's Fort, and joined the veteran fur trader in a feast in honor of the day. Even this wild country was beginning to be thinly settled, for only ten miles away they reached the post of another trader, Mr. Lupton. This post was called Fort Lancaster. It was coming to look like a well-stocked farm, with hogs, cattle, chickens, and turkeys foraging on the prairie, and a large vegetable garden. Thence the explorers continued southwest, moving parallel with the Rockies, till, on July 9, they had a momentary glimpse through the clouds of Pike's Peak.

At the point where the Boiling Spring River enters

[1] Cf. Theodore Talbot's amusing disgust: "About eight o'clock we found some ponds in which the water was not quite so nauseous and there we camped. These ponds or wallows are formed by the buffaloes wallowing, an amusement they are very fond of. When any rain falls, it is collected in these places, and here the buffalo come to drink and stand during the heat of the day; adding their own excrements to the already putrescent waters. This compound, warmed for weeks in a blazing sun and alive with animalcules, makes a drink *palatable* to one suffering from intense thirst. O, that some over-dainty connoisseur might taste of it!" A cold rain was welcomed eagerly. *Talbot MS.*, Library of Congress.

[2] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 175.

the Arkansas, Frémont "accidentally" met and re-engaged his old comrade, Kit Carson.[1] There was a village here, where a number of mountaineers, principally Americans, had taken up farming. They had a fine stock of cattle, and obtained what ready money they needed by a desultory Indian trade. Formerly, they had also traded with New Mexico, and had married Spanish women in the Taos Valley, but Mexican decrees had stopped all commercial intercourse. These decrees were a heavy blow to Frémont. He had expected to obtain California mules from Taos to replace the exhausted animals which had dragged his heavy carts for many hundred miles, and to buy new supplies of sugar, flour, and other necessaries. Both the mules and provisions were indispensable if he were to continue west over the mountains.

With the advice of Carson, he decided to retrace his steps. Kit was dispatched forthwith to Bent's Fort, some seventy-five miles downstream on the Arkansas, with instructions to lay before Charles Bent the imperative needs of the expedition. Fortunately, Bent was able to spare ten good mules, some pack animals, and a quantity of foodstuffs; and taking these with him, Kit traveled to St. Vrain's Fort, where he met Frémont. The explorer now found himself at the foot of the central chain of the Rockies, with the supplies he needed. He knew that he must go almost straight west, for the

[1] This Boiling Spring River is the Fontaine Qui Bouille or Bouit of all early travellers, and the village at its mouth is the Pueblo already spoken of.

usual ford of the Green River beyond the mountains lay in that direction. Unfortunately, he could obtain no information upon the character of the passes, and no guide. Thus handicapped, he separated his company, for greater speed and safety, into two parties. Fitzpatrick, with the heavy baggage, was to take the usual emigrant road by way of the mouth of the Laramie River to Fort Hall, the Hudson's Bay Company post on the Snake. Frémont himself took charge of the other body, a picked group of men, including Kit Carson, Preuss, and Zindel, and set out to cut through the mountains to South Pass by way of the valley of the Cache de la Poudre River. He shortly found himself in one of the wildest and most beautiful parts of the Rockies. "Towering mountains rose round about; their sides sometimes dark with forests of pine, and sometimes with lofty precipices, washed by the river; while below, the green river bottom was covered with a wilderness of flowers, their tall spikes rising above our heads as we rode among them." [1]

From this point, the road, which even in its smoother portions was made "terribly rough" by the dense sagebrush, four to six feet in height, became more and more difficult. They counted themselves lucky in killing many buffalo, and stopped for two days, some two hundred miles from St. Vrain's Fort, to dry large quantities of the meat for future use. But after struggling forward till August 7, with the roadway growing worse

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 189–190.

and worse and threatening to make progress with the light carriages wholly impossible, Frémont gave up. From an eminence that afternoon, he tells us, a mountain range became visible in the north, in which he recognized some rocky peaks of the Sweetwater Valley Range; and "determining to abandon any further effort to struggle through this almost impracticable country," he turned toward a pass in the Sweetwater Valley. His efforts to find a more southerly route to Oregon and northern California had failed.

Two days later, his party reached the well-marked Oregon Trail on the banks of the Sweetwater River, and found the broad smooth highway, where the constant passage of emigrant wagons had beaten the sagebrush out of existence, a happy exchange for the sharp rocks and tough shrubs through which their horses had been toiling.[1] From this point onward, their path was easy and, despite the dust and heat, their progress was rapid. They saw many evidences of the stream of travel. Twice within nine days they passed the new-made grave of an emigrant; once they fell in with a stray ox wandering slowly toward his eastern home. When they reached the fertile and beautiful valley of the Bear River, they overtook a single emigrant family, traveling courageously alone with three or four span of fine oxen. Frémont concluded that they were the rear guard of a larger party just ahead, and this proved to be the fact. The next afternoon, crossing a narrow

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 198.

Frémont's Expedition Breaking Camp at Dawn
(From Frémont's "Memoirs," Chicago, 1887.)

spur, they descended into a lovely valley, tributary to the Bear, and came upon a striking scene:

> The edge of the wood, for several miles along the river, was dotted with the white covers of emigrant wagons, collected in groups at different camps, where the smokes were rising lazily from the fires, around which the women were occupied in preparing the evening meal, and the children playing in the grass; and herds of cattle, grazing about in the bottom, had an air of quiet security and civilized comfort that made a rare sight for the traveller in such a remote wilderness. In common with all the emigration, they had been reposing for several days in this delightful valley, in order to recruit their animals on its luxuriant pasturage after their long journey, and prepare them for the hard travel along the comparatively sterile banks of the upper Columbia.

The Oregon Trail, indeed, was now a great American highway, as busy as the Cumberland Road a generation earlier.[1] Frémont did not halt, but, driving directly on, left the emigrants in the rear. But next morning, on breaking camp, he found just ahead of him another large party of emigrants leisurely resting, while still farther along the road there was a third. These groups were all integral parts of the great train of this year, but partly for convenience in travel and partly through fac-

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 205 ff. J. R. Schafer, *History of the Pacific Northwest*, 127 ff.

tionalism they kept somewhat apart. Each camp received him with cheers and eager greetings; again he felt that America was on the march, and he was in the vanguard.

They were now near the Great Salt Lake country, and with the lake as an objective, Frémont accelerated his pace. Some Shoshone Indians supplied him with fresh horses, vegetables, and berries. Despite this, they became increasingly hard pressed for provisions, and were glad to make an evening meal of stewed skunk. Frémont saw, and later described, some natural curiosities—hot springs, red and white hills, an extinct volcano, and so on; but he gave little time to them. On September 6, he reached the shores of the lake, and, looking down upon it from a high peninsular butte, experienced one of the memorable moments of his career as an explorer. He saw:[1]

> The waters of the inland sea stretching in still and solitary grandeur far beyond the limit of our vision. It was one of the great points of the exploration; and as we looked eagerly over the lake in the first emotions of excited pleasure, I am doubtful if the followers of Balboa felt more enthusiasm when, from the heights of the Andes, they saw for the first time the great Western Ocean. It was certainly a magnificent object, and a noble

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 228. The Oregon Trail is separated from the Great Salt Lake district by the Wasatch Range. Frémont went up the trail to the end of the range and to Bear Lake, and then turned southward to Salt Lake.

terminus to this part of our expedition; and to travellers so long shut up among mountain ranges a sudden view over the expanse of silent waters had in it something sublime. Several large islands raised their high rocky heads out of the waves; but whether or not they were timbered was still left to our imagination, as the distance was too great to determine if the dark hues upon them were woodland or naked rock.

The expectations of the party had been whetted by numerous remarkable tales related of the Lake in camp and fort, for the old hunters familiar with the region had made it the theme of exaggerated stories. Hitherto the lake had been visited only by these hunters and by trappers searching for beaver streams. Possibly Étienne Provot was one of the earliest in the vicinity; but its discovery seems to have been made by Jim Bridger in the autumn of 1824. It was Bridger who, stooping down for a drink, was astonished to find the water salt, and exclaimed, as he spat it out: "Hell, we are on the shores of the Pacific!" As yet no scientist nor anyone really interested in geography had visited it; its islands had not been trodden; it is not certain that it had ever been completely circumnavigated; and no instrumental observations nor geographical survey had ever been made in the vicinity. Most men supposed that it had no outlet; but some of Frémont's own voyageurs believed that it contained a terrible whirlpool,

through which its waters found a subterreanean way to the Pacific. The young explorer tells us that hearing various men talk, "my own mind had become tolerably well filled with their indefinite pictures, and insensibly colored with their romantic descriptions, which, in the pleasure of excitement, I . . . half expected to realize." But he was resolved to give the lake its first really scientific examination.

Nearly a week of the clear, bracing September weather was devoted to this task, and it was accomplished in a way productive of unexpected results. Frémont made a voyage out over the lake in his india-rubber boat, taking Carson with him, and enjoying the sensation of paddling over water which was "almost transparently clear, of an extremely beautiful bright-green color." The frail and badly-pasted boat, unfortunately, was so badly constructed that it was kept afloat with great difficulty, and when two of the air cylinders gave way, almost wrecked them in the middle of the lake. They landed on one of the islands here, ascended its hills to a rocky eminence 800 feet above the water, and spent the windy night there, hearing the waves break on the shore like "the roar of an ocean surf." In the course of his wanderings, he paused to make a careful chemical analysis of the water; and he took many observations upon the botany and the animal life. In all, it was an enchanting sojourn, and he left with genuine reluctance.

One of his conclusions was that the region about the lake, and especially to the north of it, in the Bear River

Valley, was suitable for a military post and a civilized settlement, which ought to flourish and would be of great strategic value. The bottom lands of the Bear River and the creeks, he pointed out, already formed a natural camping ground for emigrants. Nutritious bunch grass for live stock was abundant; service berries flourished; timber and water were plentiful, and the soil was adapted to grain.[1] As a result of Frémont's description of the Great Salt Lake and the valley, Brigham Young determined four years later to lead the Mormons into this far-off region to set up the State of Deseret. Young did not read Frémont's report with full comprehension; for he later charged Frémont with representing the Great Salt Lake as in part salt, and in part fresh, which Frémont had not done at all. He also declared that Frémont had described as a fertile country what was in reality a desert. But despite Young's misconceptions, the Mormons had reason to be grateful to the enthusiastic explorer whose accounts had led them across the Rockies.

Setting out northward from Great Salt Lake on September 12, 1843, Frémont and his little party rode forward so steadily that they reached Fort Hall on the Snake River at sunset of the 18th. They were tormented by hunger along the way; on their first night, they supped upon some sea gulls which Carson shot near the lake, and on their third Frémont gave the men permission to kill a fat young horse which he had purchased

[1] Frémont, *Report, Second Expedition*, 212, 213.

from the Snake Indians. The horse meat soon restored the forlorn group "to gayety and good humor," but neither Frémont or Preuss could quite muster courage enough to eat of it. They had too much of civilized prejudice, wrote Frémont; "feeling as much saddened as if a crime had been committed." Later still, they bought an antelope from an Indian for a little powder and lead.

At Fort Hall, where they joined forces again with Fitzpatrick and his party, a thorough refitting and reorganization of the expedition took place. The officer in charge of this southeastern outpost of the Hudson's Bay Company, a Briton named Grant, sold them several poor horses and five fat oxen. This meat was much needed, though Fitzpatrick had rigidly husbanded his share of the stock of flour and light provisions.[1] Already the weather warned them that the harsh northern winter was approaching. On September 19, 1843, it snowed thickly all day; on the night of the 21st, standing water froze fairly hard. The Lieutenant therefore called his men together, and to the accompaniment of a cold drizzle told them that he thought it best to cut off from his expedition all who were not ready to face the rigors of steady midwinter exploration with scanty food and other supplies. He described the hardships they would probably suffer. Eleven men, including the trusty Basil Lajeunesse, decided to return east, and set

[1] Frémont, *Report, Second Expedition*, 215 ff.

out at once. Frémont and his diminished party on the same day, September 23, resumed their journey down the Snake Valley toward the Pacific, marching in a chill drizzle, which the wind drove in their faces in sharp gusts. Before he left, he made up his mind that at or near Fort Hall there ought to be a strong American military post, keeping guard over a farming settlement in this part of the Snake Valley, and protecting the Oregon emigrants from Indian attacks. It was deplorable, he wrote later, that these emigrants, exhausted by the long journey of 1,320 miles from Missouri, should have no assistance save the meager and costly aid furnished by a none-too-friendly British fur post.

At the end of the first week in October, 1843, Frémont's expedition reached Fort Boisé, another Hudson's Bay Company post, at the point where the Boisé River flows through high basalt precipices into the Snake. A fortnight later, the weather steadily growing colder, they found themselves approaching the district where the Snake, the Columbia proper, the Yakima, and the Walla Walla all merge to form that magnificent stream, the lower Columbia. Frémont was impressed by the scenery. Far to the west, one hundred and eighty miles away, they could see the snowy cone of Mount Hood standing out high above the surrounding country, majestic in its isolation. Here was the mission establishment of the noted Dr. Marcus Whitman, consisting at this time of a single adobe house.

Frémont felt that he was again approaching civilization:[1]

> I found Dr. Whitman absent on a visit to the Dalles of the Columbia; but had the pleasure of seeing a fine-looking family of emigrants, men, women, and children, in robust health, all indemnifying themselves for previous scanty fare in a hearty consumption of potatoes, which are produced here of a remarkably good quality. We were disappointed in our expectation of obtaining corn-meal or flour at this station, the mill belonging to the mission having been lately burned down; but an abundant supply of excellent potatoes banished regrets, and furnished a grateful substitute for bread. A small town of Nez Percé Indians gave an inhabited and even a populous appearance to the station; and, after remaining about an hour, we continued our route and encamped on the river about four miles below, passing on the way an emigrant encampment.

From Whitman's mission to the Dalles—that is, the trough where the Columbia is squeezed into a narrow basalt gash, only fifty yards across at the narrowest point—was a difficult journey along the shores of the Columbia, taking till November 5. Here the bulk of the expedition was left to make repairs and prepare for the homeward journey, while Frémont, Preuss, and two

[1] Frémont, *Report, Second Expedition*, 249.

others went on by canoe to Fort Vancouver, far down the Columbia River. The trip was necessary to connect Frémont's operations with those of Captain Wilkes, and was quickly and easily made. On November 18, 1843, the explorer was back in the general camp at the Dalles, bringing with him a three months' supply of flour, peas, and tallow. At the Dalles, the expedition had also obtained a number of cattle to be driven along and slaughtered, and enough horses and mules to bring the total number of pack animals up to 104. Then, with the carts abandoned and with a great number of pack-saddles prepared for the supplies, the party set out on the return to the United States.

Had Frémont been an explorer who chose the safe and easy path, had he been intent upon getting back to St. Louis quickly with his observations upon the Oregon Trail and the Columbia River country, he would simply have retraced his steps. But his intention was very different. He had planned, in his talks with Benton and Linn, to return home by a sweeping southward journey which would reveal some of the secrets of the Great Basin between the Rockies and the Sierras; the desert valley which includes so much of Utah, Nevada, and New Mexico. This great region, more than seven hundred miles square, was a challenge which he could not resist. It had already been crossed from east to west by Jedediah Smith, Joseph Walker, and others; it had never as yet been traversed from the north to the south. Frémont meant to attempt just

this. His three main geographical objectives were to locate and describe Klamath Lake, "Mary's Lake," and the "Rio Buenaventura"—the last two being wholly mythical bodies.

No one knew better than the young Lieutenant that this was a serious and dangerous undertaking. It was the commencement of winter; he had only twenty-five men; the country before him was wild and strange, and he did not have even the imperfect maps of the latest travelers. Weird and almost incredible tales were told of the disappearing rivers, the scorching deserts, the high mountains, and the groveling savages of the region. But, as Frémont later recalled, no man of his party blenched, or failed to exhibit entire courage and cheerfulness; "nor did any extremity of peril and privation, to which we were afterwards exposed, ever belie, or derogate from, the fine spirit of this brave and generous commencement." But as yet they little understood how grave these perils would be.

## CHAPTER XII

## OVER THE WINTER SIERRAS

As Frémont must shrewdly have guessed, the essentially significant portion of his second expedition lay just before him when he turned south from the Columbia. What he had done thus far was simply to complete a scientific survey of a much-traveled trail. He was now to execute a journey through a region largely unknown, a peaceful invasion of a foreign country.

Lake Klamath was reached in zero weather, and the Lieutenant, in order to explore its banks and give his animals pasturage, lingered there two days. It was just such a lake, in reality half a marsh, as he expected. Over the greater part of its bed, at the time of his December visit, the water, or rather the ice, was scattered in shallow pools. The lake was little more than a wide irregular depression, twenty miles in diameter, which for a short time after the spring melting of the winter snows filled up with water, which subsequently drained away through the Klamath River, leaving most of the bed a waving green savannah. The explorer fell in with the Indians of the lake region, who had adapted their life with remarkable skill to the locality. Living in large round huts, perhaps twenty feet in diameter, they had learned to make expert use of the marsh grass and

rushes. Their grass shoes were well adapted to the snowy country; the women had woven large close-textured caps of basket shape; and they also made handsome varicolored mats, some of which the expedition bought for tablecloths and mattresses. On his last morning at this place, Frémont's camp was thronged with Klamath Indians, and, knowing their treacherous habits, he kept vigilant guard.

The lake was left behind them on December 13, and they pushed farther east, with the sun shining brightly but the cold intense, and the snow from four to twelve inches deep. The mules pulling the howitzer floundered heavily along the uncertain way, and the men found walking laborious. Farther southeast they went, always farther southeast, toward what is now the southern boundary of Oregon. On December 14, amid a thick snowstorm, they crossed what Frémont mistakenly believed to be the headwaters of the Sacramento, the stream actually being the Klamath River.[1] The next day they killed their cow, which could find no grass above the snow and was getting thinner and thinner. When they broke camp on December 16, they found the snow three feet deep, and so crusted that the pack animals constantly cut their legs breaking through it. Their path now lay through a dense pine forest, the

[1] Dellenbaugh, *Frémont and '49*, 191. Frémont's Lake Klamath or Tlamath is now Lower Klamath Lake, north of the California border; Little Klamath Lake lies across the border. Frémont moved east from Upper Klamath Lake a considerable distance, then south to Warner Lake, and southeast to the border of what is now Nevada.

Frémont's Second Expedition on Klamath Lake
(From Frémont's "Memoirs," Chicago, 1887.)

green branches bowed with snow, and the air dark with the falling flakes. The depths of the somber woodland were profoundly still, and Frémont felt a wonderful impressiveness and beauty in the quiet, broken only by some sudden breath of wind whirling the snow through the upper branches. One direction looked like another; they seemed to be going through some detached and enchanted wilderness, and it required an exertion of the will to preserve a constant course. Thus struggling forward, they came out at noon on the verge of a vertical rocky cliff. They were traversing an upland ridge which overlooked one of the valleys of the Great Basin, and south and southeast their eyes fell upon an entrancing scene:[1]

> At our feet—more than a thousand feet below—we looked into a green prairie country, in which a beautiful lake, some twenty miles in length, was spread along the foot of the mountains, its shores bordered with green grass. Just then the sun broke out among the clouds, and illuminated the country below, while around us the storm raged fiercely. Not a particle of ice was to be seen on the lake, or snow on its borders, and all was like summer or spring. The glow of the sun in the valley below brightened up our hearts with sudden pleasure; and we made the woods ring with joyful shouts to those behind; and gradually, as each came up, he stopped to enjoy the unexpected scene. Shiver-

[1] Frémont, *Report, Second Expedition*, 289–290.

> ing on snow three feet deep, and stiffening in a cold north wind, we exclaimed at once that the names of Summer Lake and Winter Ridge should be applied to these two proximate places of such sudden and violent contrast.

Descending to this central valley, the expedition found travel for the next few days much easier, and the weather milder. They celebrated Christmas Day on the banks of Warner Lake in lower Oregon by a discharge of the howitzer and their small arms, and by serving a ration of brandy, sugar, and coffee. The next night they made camp nearly on the present Nevada boundary line, and the following morning pressed on into northwestern Nevada. Their march carried them through a district of lakes and streams, the drainage of the great Sierra Range, dominated by Mount Shasta, which rose to their right. Frémont began to grow worried, for his twenty-five men were tired and his equipment was failing, while they had met no evidence whatever of Mary's Lake or the Buenaventura River. They had lost fifteen pack animals, dead, abandoned, or stolen, since they left the Dalles, and on January 13 they killed the last of their cattle.

They were genuinely hungry when, on the 10th, they reached a large interior lake, thirty-five miles long, which was full of large salmon trout, two to four feet in length, and had a feast. By this time they were in a

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 311.

region populous with Indians, and as they advanced they saw signal smokes in every direction. Frémont named the water, from an extraordinary rock rising from it, Pyramid Lake, and named the fresh stream flowing into it, today known as the Truckee, the Salmon Trout River. Still moving south, the expedition camped some twenty-five miles from the site of Reno, and on January 18 reached the Carson River. By now the men were tired and hungry, and the pack animals all footsore; moreover, the country ahead seemed to be barren, rocky, and difficult.

Under these circumstances, Frémont felt justified in announcing to the men a determination which he was only too glad to reach; a resolution which had been half formed when he left the Missouri, and which had taken more definite shape with every mile. This was the crossing of the Sierras into California. There can be little doubt that the expansionist senators, and Benton and Linn in particular, had reached an understanding with Frémont that he was to enter California and spy out the land. They knew that it was like a great ripe fruit, ready to fall into the first hand that touched it; they knew that the British were casting envious eyes upon it. They felt that if there was to be war with Mexico over Texas, the United States should possess authentic information upon the feasible mountain passes for an invasion of California; upon the resources of its fertile valleys; upon the attitude of the Californians toward the United States; and upon the strength and position

of the Mexican forces under Governor Alvarado. Who could collect this information so well as Frémont, whose journey would carry him to the very gates of California anyway?

Unquestionably, Frémont hoped that the mythical Buenaventura might be found, and would lead him down to San Francisco Bay, which the expansionists were so eager to prevent from falling into British possession. When this hope disappeared, he made up his mind to cross the great Sierra Range anyway, just as an American army might have to cross it if war broke out. The exhausted state of his expedition and the difficulty of pressing on by the southwestern route to the Arkansas without recuperation and refitting was a sufficient excuse for this bold move. Actually, there was no necessity for entering California. He could have spent the remainder of the winter comfortably in the Truckee Valley, his men living on antelope, small game, salmon, and pine nuts, his mules growing fat on the good pasturage, and the best homeward route established by reconnaissance. But this would have been a waste of good opportunities. A Mexican decree had prohibited Americans from entering California anywhere, under any pretext, but that did not daunt Frémont, any more than it did numerous American settlers.

As a mere physical venture, the attempt to cross the high Sierras in midwinter was appallingly foolhardy. This mighty range, in places 14,500 feet high, rises precipitously from the east, steep on steep, to a point

where, in January, all is a silent, frozen waste of snow and rock, as bleak, empty, and bitter as the Himalayas themselves, with no life or movement save the terrific storms which sweep across the peaks and valleys. The pine forests which lead up to these heights are choked with snow. Paths and trails are hidden beneath the drifts, and the sub-zero temperature means death for those who lose themselves in the mountain corridors. If an unusual series of blizzards had overtaken Frémont's party, it could not have avoided the fate of the Donner emigrants, overwhelmed and unable to move either forward or back. There are few passes in the high Sierras, and in the year 1844 they were virtually unknown. No maps were available, no scientist had ever examined the range, and no white man had ever crossed it in winter.

Yet Frémont embarked upon this perilous undertaking in a characteristically headlong way. Whereas he might profitably have spent a week or two on the Truckee gaining strength and by brief expeditions searching for the best pass, he plunged immediately and blindly into the maze of foothills which led to the formidable icy rampart beyond. As Mr. F. S. Dellenbaugh says, a delay of a fortnight would have cost nothing and would have benefited him materially; but delay was never congenial to Frémont. Setting out on January 19, 1844, on the second day he camped in the Pine Nut Mountains near the present site of Virginia City. He little thought that within a few miles was a stupendously rich vein of gold and silver, the Comstock

Lode, which twenty years later was to bring into existence one of the roaring cities of the West. On January 24, he met an old Indian of the Washoe tribe, who volunteered to lead the expedition to a good pass in the Sierras, and who not only accompanied them for two days, but introduced them to some of his tribesmen who sold them pine nuts. The road grew constantly rougher as they approached the main chain of the Sierras, and on January 29 they were compelled to a step which Frémont deeply regretted: they abandoned their little howitzer, which had been dragged so many miles and had never proved more than a useless encumbrance. Another Indian was hired as guide, a young Washoe, and on January 30 he led them into the head of Antelope Valley, but becoming cold and discouraged, shortly left.

The Indians whom they met at this point all advised Frémont against continuing farther. They could communicate with him only by signs, for nobody understood their tongue, but in their earnestness they spoke rapidly and vehemently, emphasizing the folly of Frémont's intentions. The word *tahve,* signifying snow, occurred often in their discourse. They plainly thought the Sierras impassable. Already, in the foothills, the thermometer was below zero at night, and the snow three or four feet deep in some places. Frémont, however, assured the savages that his horses were strong, and that they would force a passage through the drifts. On

January 31, they saw clearly what was before them. That afternoon, with the snow falling heavily and the weather so frigid that one man had his foot frozen, they descended a pass which gave them a long view westward. They saw embanked before them a great continuous range, its foot defined by the Carson River Valley, its lower parts steep and darkly clothed with pines, its magnificent crests hidden in clouds of snow. This forbidding rampart was the central chain of the Sierras.

Just what Frémont's men thought of the enterprise we do not know. The young commander served out an occasional ration of brandy to heighten their spirits; he exhorted them like Napoleon before the Pyramids. He reminded them of the beautiful valley of the Sacramento, so often described to them by Kit Carson, who had been there and who had delighted the expedition by speaking of its rich pastures and abundant game. He drew a contrast between its summer climate, less than a hundred miles distant, and the bitter cold they now suffered. He informed them that his instruments, in which long experience had given them the utmost confidence, showed that seventy miles directly west was the great ranch of Captain Sutter; and that from the heights just before them they would be able with one effort to place themselves in the midst of plenty. Frémont had at times a ready French eloquence, but it is not certain that his exuberance and sanguine confidence

carried the men with him. He tells us that some of them remained "unusually silent." [1]

They started upward on the morning of February 2, 1844, a clear and frosty dawn, in a mood deeply serious and even foreboding. From this point, an old chief told them, it took six or seven days to cross the mountains in fair summer weather. Their Indian guide —for they had procured another—shook his head doubtfully as he pointed to the icy pinnacles of the Sierras thrusting high into the sky. They knew that the issue of their adventure was doubtful. They now had sixty-seven animals with them, but their provisions were falling low. They possessed no tallow or grease; no salt, a grievous deprivation; and they had been so long without meat that one of the messes received permission to eat a fat dog which they had with them. The snow deepened immediately, and it was necessary to begin a systematic breaking-out of paths. This was done by forming a party of ten, mounted on the strongest horses; each man took turns in breaking a way, and as he became tired, the next one took his place. So well did this plan work that on the first day they traveled sixteen miles, and mounted to an altitude of 6,760 feet, camping here in four feet of snow, but near a meadow of bunch grass partly cleared by the wind.

Thus they pushed on. On February 3 they made less progress, only seven miles; on February 4, 1844, they were brought almost to a stop. In the afternoon, they

[1] Frémont, *Report, Second Expedition*, 324 ff.

attempted to force a road toward a pass which the guide indicated ahead, but their horses, after laboriously plunging two or three hundred yards, became exhausted and refused to make any further effort. The guide regarded their position as hopeless, telling them they were just beginning to enter the deep snow. Most of the animals had been got thus far only by leaving their packs behind, so that the trail was strewn with stores and equipage. The party had no choice but to camp where they were, on the heavily wooded mountainside, without shelter, in a freezing wind. They built fires, covered the snow with large boughs, and soon had a degree of comfort. But many of the men were ready to give up. There ensued a scene which impressed itself upon Frémont's mind, and of which he has left us a vivid picture:

> Two Indians joined our party here; and one of them, an old man, immediately began to harangue us, saying that ourselves and animals would perish in the snow, and that if we would go back, he would show us another and a better way across the mountain. He spoke in a very loud voice and there was a singular repetition of phrases and arrangements of words which rendered his speech striking and not unmusical.
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> We had now begun to understand some words, and with the aid of signs, easily comprehended the old man's simple ideas. "Rock upon rock—rock

upon rock—snow upon snow—snow upon snow," said he; "even if you get over the snow you will not be able to get down from the mountains." He made us the sign of precipices, and showed us how the feet of the horses would slip, and throw them off from the narrow trails which led along their sides.

Our Chinook [guide], who comprehended even more readily than ourselves, and believed our situation hopeless, covered his head with his blanket and began to weep and lament. "I wanted to see the whites," he said; "I came away from my own people to see the whites, and I wouldn't care to die among them; but here" . . . and he looked around into the cold night and gloomy forest, and, drawing his blanket over his head, began again to lament.

Seated around the tree, the fire illuminating the rocks and the tall bolls of the pines round about, and the old Indian haranguing, we presented a group of very serious faces.

A man with less force of will, less buoyancy of temperament, than Frémont, would have turned back, but he was not daunted. At dawn the next morning their faint-hearted Indian guide deserted. Frémont, who found the night too cold for sleep, had seen him standing by the fire with all his finery on, and, observing him shiver, had kindly thrown his blanket over his shoul-

JOB'S PEAK OF THE SIERRA NEVADA IN CALIFORNIA

(Altitude 10,500 feet; close to Frémont Trail in 1844. Reproduced by courtesy of Mr. F. S. Dellenbaugh.)

ders; a few minutes afterward, and the treacherous fellow had decamped. The Lieutenant's mind had been busy overnight, and he had resolved to set the majority of his party to making sledges and bringing up the scattered baggage while he and a few others undertook a reconnaissance on foot of the heights ahead.

This reconnaissance, in the face of terrifying obstacles, was successfully effected on February 6, 1844. The snow before them lay in an average depth of five feet, and not infrequently, as they judged by the tree tops emerging from it, was twenty feet deep. On steep slopes, it was covered with an icy crust of great slipperiness, down which the horses would sometimes slide, helpless till some tree or rock arrested them. At this elevation of 7,500 feet, the cold was intense the moment the sun passed behind a peak or cloud, and the party had to keep moving briskly even at midday. They made a weaving, circuitous path, for the great depth of snow in the hollows compelled them to follow the hillsides and cross the jutting spurs, where the wind and sun had in part cleared away the drifts. The men, wearing snowshoes, marched in a single file, trampling down the snow as heavily as they could, so that, after freezing hard in the night, it might bear the weight of the horses the following day.

The ground first ascended sharply to the top of a fairly high ridge; beyond this lay a broad timbered basin, some ten miles across; and at its extremity rose the high crest of the Sierras, a gloomy wall of volcanic

rock. The extreme summit presented a line of naked peaks, the harsh rock glowing in the morning sun, bare of either snow or vegetation; but leading up to this summit, the slopes were all covered with pines and other trees of extraordinary size.

After much effort, the little reconnoitering party reached the crest of the range, slightly to the left of a pass which had been pointed out by their guide. A welcome sight met their eyes. The mountain slopes, in part densely wooded, descended steeply below them. Far in the distance at their base, lying half defined in a warm haze, stretched a great, smiling valley, its greens and browns untouched by any sign of snow.[1] Straining their eyes, they could descry far to the west, not less than a hundred miles away, another and smaller line of mountains—the low Coast Range. Frémont stood in speechless delight, while the men shouted for joy. It was the fertile Sacramento basin. "There," exclaimed Kit Carson, pointing toward the coast, "is the little mountain—it is fifteen years ago since I saw it; but I am just as sure as if I had seen it yesterday." They could pick out spots of prairie in the valley, and with the telescope could vaguely follow the dim dark line of the Sacramento. Then they turned hurriedly back toward camp, for the sun was sinking.

It proved a difficult struggle to bring up the animals and to carry the whole outfit over the summits. The glare of the snow rendered many of the party al-

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 333.

most blind, and only by tying black handkerchiefs over their eyes could they keep on. The trail that had been beaten on the 6th was filled with driving snow on February 9 and 10, when Frémont and a few others advanced only about five and a half miles, leaving the animals at the base camp. For a time, it seemed almost impossible to get the horses and mules over the pass at all. Fitzpatrick, who had been left behind to make the attempt, reported that his efforts were futile. When he led them out on the half-hidden trail, the packed snow beneath would not support them, and they broke through; some plunged about in the drifts, and some lay buried in the white mass. But Frémont refused to be defeated. He had the entire force turn to with mauls and shovels, set them to scooping and packing down a road, and made them strengthen it with pine boughs. It was exhausting work, and the food on which they did it was none too substantial. On the 13th the cook killed their little pet dog Klamath, and that night they supped on mule meat, dog meat, and pea soup.

Their victory came on February 20, 1844. On that day, the expedition camped with all its animals and equipment on the summit of the pass, one thousand miles by their tortuous road from the Dalles of the Columbia. They had conquered the Sierras in midwinter. By boiling water on the pass, they computed its elevation at 9,338 feet. Only the descent lay before them, and this seemed easy. The weather became delightfully clear, and as they went downward they had the benefit of wide

views of the country below, with light and shadow playing across it. On the afternoon of the 23d, they heard the roll of thunder, and looking downward saw the broad breast of the valley wrapped in the darkness of a storm, the jagged lightning playing in and out of the clouds. A thunderstorm meant the approach of summer. They watched it till sunset, when the clearing skies revealed another magnificent scene: a long shining line of water directing its way toward another gleaming expanse, a broader and larger sheet. They knew that this could be nothing but the Sacramento River and San Francisco Bay. That night, as they made their camp fires, they saw blazes lit in the valley below, as if in answer. They were actually the fires of Indians in the tulares on the Bay, eighty miles distant.

On March 6, 1844, after many further trials, the ragged, hungry expedition was in complete contact with such civilization as upper California afforded. They had found the Sacramento Valley, as they advanced, an enchantingly beautiful country, which seemed unequaled anywhere in the West for stock growing. Its reaches were gay with flowers, and in places were a mass of gold with the California poppy. Much of the valley was beautifully wooded with evergreen and white oak, and, as there was no underbrush, it all had the appearance of a carefully tended park. Here and there were the traces of horses and cattle, and they had once passed a small village of Indians. In mid-afternoon, canter-

ing forward, the men in advance gave a sudden shout. They had come in sight of a little bluff, topped by a neatly built house with glass windows! It was occupied only by a few Indians, but they rode forward more eagerly than ever. A large stream, sometimes one hundred yards wide, flowed on their right, and swept around a broad bend; the hills grew lower, until they entirely ceased; and entering a wide valley, the men rode unexpectedly into a populous Indian village. The inhabitants wore clean cotton shirts and other articles of civilized apparel. Frémont's men were overjoyed when a well-dressed Indian came up, and saluting them in fluent and courteous Spanish, told them they were upon the Rio de Los Americanos, which flowed into the Sacramento River ten miles below them. The weary party was near its goal.

Carson continued questioning the Indian and joyously translated his replies to Frêmont. The native told them that he was a vaquero, or cowboy; that all the other Indians about were employees of the same ranch; and that it belonged to Captain Sutter, upon whose riches and power he expatiated. The name was repeated with respect, for Sutter was known all the way from the Pacific to the Mississippi. Frémont asked to be directed to his house, and was told that it lay just over the hill, whither the Indian, whose horse was picketed near by, would conduct them. They rode forward, forded the river, and after a few miles came within sight of a large, low, powerful-looking structure

of whitish adobe, with several buildings rising over its enormously thick walls. This post, its chief angles bastioned by little blockhouses, was the fort built by Sutter as a defense against savages, marauding bands, and the guerrillas whom the frequent outbreaks of civil war in California set loose upon the country. It was an edifice of manifest strength. They were upon the site of the future city of Sacramento.

## CHAPTER XIII

## SUTTER'S FORT AND CALIFORNIA

It was a tattered, exhausted, woebegone caravan which wound its way up to the gates of Sutter's Fort. Of the sixty-three horses and mules which had begun the ascent of the Sierras, only thirty-three survived. Frémont and a few others had good mounts, but the rest made a pathetic procession, crawling along single file, skeleton men leading skeleton horses. They needed all of Sutter's generosity.

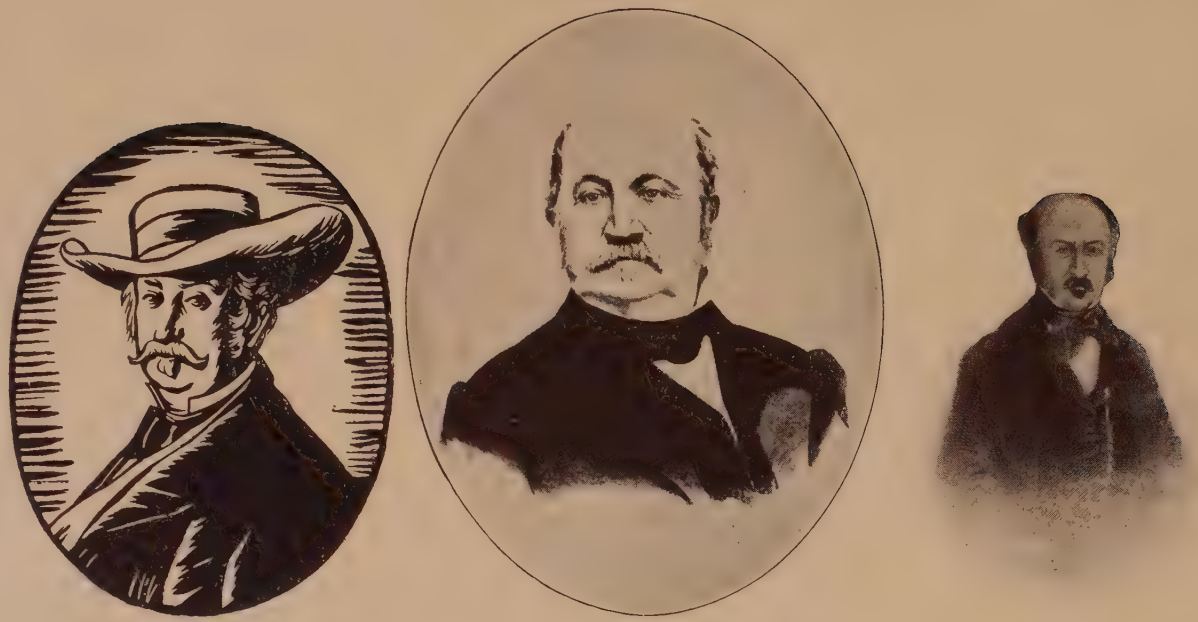
Sutter, as his short, stout figure, the blond hair fringing his bald head, his large blue eyes, and his air of cherubic kindness all testified, was of German blood. He had been born in Kandern, Baden, forty-one years earlier, had spent most of his early life in Switzerland, had been educated in a military college at Berne, and had served in the French Army. He always spoke of himself as a Swiss. A dreamer, enterprising and adventurous, he had slipped all his home responsibilities and arrived in New York, almost penniless, in the summer of 1834. His imaginative French biographer tells us that, leaving a trail of creditors behind him, he signalized his landing in New York by a wild gesture. "He leaped upon the quay, dodged past the police guard placed there, threw a single rapid glance along the

whole water front, uncorked and emptied at a draught a bottle of Rhine wine, threw the empty bottle into a West Indian lugger, and with an exultant burst of laughter launched himself into the passing crowd."[1] For some time he picked up a living in the East by turning his hand to anything he could find, from book-keeping to taxidermy, and then he set out restlessly for the West. At St. Charles, Missouri, near where the Missouri flows into the Mississippi, he bought land and prospered as a farmer; but the unceasing flow of emigrants, trappers, hunters, and adventurers past his door fascinated him. He is said to have made a trip to Santa Fé and to have heard much there concerning the glories of California.

In 1838 or thereabouts, Sutter sold his farm and set out along the Oregon Trail to the Dalles. Arriving late in the fall, he was told that the snow in the mountains and the hostile Indians made it impossible for him to continue on to California, and was urged to accept employment with the Hudson's Bay Company. But his imagination had been set on fire by what he had been told of California—its incomparable wealth, its scanty population, and the feeble Mexican grasp upon its allegiance.[2] He took a vessel to Honolulu, and waited there until he could get a ship back to San Francisco Bay. During this Hawaiian stay, he was struck by an ingenious and profitable idea: since labor was scarce in California, and he would need many hands

[1] Blaise Cendrars, *L'Or*, 31.

[2] J. A. Schoonover, *Life and Times of Gen. John A. Sutter.*



THREE PORTRAITS OF CAPTAIN SUTTER

(The one with the flaring neckband is from Walter Colton's "Three Years in California"; that with a hat is from Blaise Cendrar's "Sutter's Gold" ["L'Or"]; the third, with the black coat, is from Frémont's "Memoirs." Frémont made a brief speech at Sutter's burial in 1880.)

for the ranch he had planned, why not employ a company of the sturdy Kanakas whom he saw all about him? Some associates in Honolulu gave him material encouragement in the project, and it was arranged that the first Kanakas should arrive at New Helvetia—for this was the name Sutter bestowed upon his future domain —within a year and a half.

Once landed in California, Sutter hastened to present himself before Governor Alvarado at Monterey. With the Governor's permission, he declared, he would take up a ranch in the country, bring in a troop of Kanakas to till the ground, and establish a post, well-armed, that would serve as a protecting barrier to settlements between it and the coast. Alvarado was favorably impressed with the energetic, enthusiastic young man. He was struck, too, by Sutter's well-matured plans. The Swiss pointed out that his undertaking might be made of far-reaching benefit to the civilized Indians, many thousands of whom had been thrown back into savagery and misery by the confiscation in 1834 of the religious establishments by the Mexican Government; that as his ranch developed, he could bring many of these Indians together, and assign them land to be worked under his direction. He wished to plant the ranch in the Sacramento Valley. If all went well, he would accomplish a telling stroke for the rehabilitation of upper California, so depressed and unprosperous since the birth of an independent Mexico.

The result was that Governor Alvarado promised

Sutter eleven square leagues (about 57,600 acres or the equivalent of three American townships) of unoccupied land on the upper Sacramento; and the indomitable Swiss, chartering at San Francisco Bay a schooner and buying several launches, penetrated inland to the mouth of the American River.[1] Here, on August 12, 1839, he discharged his possessions; and with fifteen loyal men, he mounted guns, posted sentries, and began bringing his little empire into control. Before winter closed in, he drove to his ranch about five hundred head of cattle and seventy-five horses, purchased at a low rate from native Californians. Apparently he had in his employ a motley crew—sailors, Kanakas, Mexican cowboys, and friendly Indians. The ferocity with which they labored transformed the place before Christmas. Wells were dug; water was brought from the river in wooden pipes; fields were laid out, bridges thrown across streams, roads constructed, and trails marked. On a spot of rising ground overlooking the Sacramento and the American, they set to work upon a ranch house and other structures: stables, granaries, storehouses, kitchens and workshops. These and the surrounding walls were built of the most substantial materials and planned to last a lifetime. A village for the Kanakas was hastily constructed in a neighboring ravine, and constant supervision kept them as busy as the rest.

For a time, the Indians proved a grim menace; once Sutter's life was saved by a mastiff which sprang upon

[1] Schoonover, *Life and Times of Gen. John A. Sutter.*

a would-be assassin who had entered his bedroom, and repeatedly, he later told American visitors, he was so hemmed in by savage assailants that he had to subsist upon the seeds of the wild grass of the region.[1] They watched his encroachments upon their ancient hunting ground indignantly, and were ready to seize the first opportunity to fall upon him, murder his employees, and burn his grain and buildings. Moreover, the region was overrun by bands of brigands, some of them large and formidable. But the ranch grew steadily in strength and importance. More and more land was brought under cultivation. New convoys of Kanakas arrived from the Pacific Islands. Sutter sent recruiting agents among the friendly Indian villages, and within a short time some two hundred and fifty natives, partly civilized by mission contacts, were busy on his estate. In 1841, he was joined by several American immigrants who had come overland, and whom he was glad to use as overseers. Other Americans straggled in, and even those who did not take up land under his grant, or hire themselves out to him, grew accustomed to use his fort as a rendezvous. The Sacramento, in fact, by the winter of Frémont's sudden arrival, was the center of an extensive American settlement, upon which the Mexican authorities looked with increasing suspicion.

Frémont, intent upon observing all that he could in California, was impressed by Sutter's establishment. He found that he was making arrangements for irriga-

[1] Edwin Bryant, *What I Saw in California*, 265 ff.

tion along the American. The waving green of his wheat fields, all sowed by the thin, ragged, sun-darkened Indians, represented three hundred fanegas of seed. His herds were increasing, his fields expanding, and he was surrounded by a peaceable, industrious population. The Indians labored stolidly at all the operations of the huge ranch—at ditch digging, plowing, harrowing, seeding, brick making, and building; and Frémont saw those about the fort feeding like animals upon the poorer meat of slaughtered oxen, and the bran sifted from Sutter's horse-mill. This bran was boiled into a mush in large wooden kettles and then placed in wooden troughs, in the courtyard, from which the messes scooped out what they wanted in their hands. For their work, the Indians were paid in goods from Sutter's large store, and tin coins, each stamped with a certain number representing the days labored, were issued by Sutter for circulation.[1] The rancher had only to apply to a friendly chief to receive an ample supply of Indian boys and girls for training. At the moment, he had a large company of girls at the fort, whom he hoped to employ as operatives in a woolen factory.

It was plain to Frémont that Sutter thoroughly enjoyed his position as Margrave of the upper Sacramento, the ruler of a domain equal to several cantons of Switzerland. He allowed the story to become current

[1] Bryant, *What I Saw in California*, 265 ff.

that he was a former courtier of Charles X of France.[1] He had an immense liking for popularity, applause, and even gross flattery, which his dependents gave him in generous quantity. But Frémont saw that he was shrewd enough to preserve a position of comparative independence in a country which was torn by conflicting forces and a fierce factional strife. Some of the American settlers were plotting to detach the country from its loose allegiance to Mexico, and to throw it into the hands of the United States; and the Mexicans were well aware that an uprising might occur at any moment. Between the two sides, Sutter maintained a position of safe neutrality. He kept up an appearance of fidelity to the Mexican Government, yet he gave the Americans of the region to understand that if the test came at the right time they might count on his support; and by a courier service he kept himself and them in communication with St. Louis. The result was that the Mexican authorities paid him every outward mark of respect and gave him the title of Guardian of the Northern Frontier, with the rank of captain, while at the same time the Americans regarded him as a potential ally.

The skilled workmen of the little settlement were invaluable to Frémont's exhausted expedition. The forge of the blacksmith's shop roared day and night while the horses and mules were shod; bridles and packsaddles were brought from the storerooms; one shift followed

[1] Josiah Royce, *California From the Conquest in 1846 to the Second Vigilance Committee in San Francisco*, 41.

another at the horse-mill, grinding flour for the party; and all was bustle and movement. Fresh horses and cattle were delivered and paid for. Sutter, insisting that Frémont and his men get as much repose as they could, seemed the soul of hospitality. "In manners, dress, and general deportment," later wrote one American, "he approaches so near what we call the 'old school gentleman' as to present a gulfy contrast from the rude society by which he is surrounded." The dining room at the fort was plainly furnished with an ordinary pine table and benches, and its dishes were very ordinary china. But Sutter's Indian girls were able to serve what seemed to Frémont a sumptuous feast. They brought in salmon and trout fresh from the rivers; roast ham, venison, bear meat, smoked tongue, and fresh steaks; green peas, salads, and many fruits; and good Rhine wine—a refreshing contrast to the piñon nuts and dog stew upon which Frémont and his fellow explorers had been faring.

Most important of all for the future of Frémont and California was his intercourse with the American settlers of the Sacramento Valley. Sutter had in his employ some thirty white men, of whom part were Europeans, but a majority were Americans. A few miles distant on the American River lay the ranch of an American named Sinclair, while just across the Sacramento was that of the newcomer Joseph B. Chiles. The explorer was told that the previous summer a party of easterners had entered the valley from Oregon, while in

the fall a second company had arrived after an arduous journey by way of Fort Boise and the Pit River Valley.[1] He learned that trappers tired of the mountainside and sailors tired of the sea were constantly settling down in California. It was evident that the American immigration was swelling to a considerable stream. Only two years later, the consul of the United States in Monterey was able to report that there were almost 1,200 foreigners in California, and to describe the mounting flow from the East:[2]

> The first arrival of American settlers on the Sacramento has been since 1840; three-fourths of the full number of foreigners in this country are Americans, of the remaining fourth, the subjects of Great Britain predominate. Of this fourth, the majority are in expectation of being under the government of the United States; probably all are willing, in preference to remaining as they now are; for the last five years, the larger proportion of the emigrants have arrived at New Helvetia (Captain Sutter's establishment) excepting a few of them from Oregon; they leave Independence, Mo., which is the starting point, every April or May, arriving on the Pacific in September or October. Soon after their arrival at New Helvetia they [are] scattered over the River Sacramento and the Bay of San Francisco, asking for farms

[1] *History of Sutter County, California*, Ch. 5.
[2] Thomas Larkin, *Papers*, State Department; written 1846, dated May 1, 1847.

> from the government, or settling on private grants by the owners' consent; some have arrived at the Pueblo de los Angeles (Town of the Angels), near San Pedro, *via* Santa Fé, some of whom had married at the latter place; a few arrived from Valparaiso, Callao, and the Sandwich Islands; a person traveling from San Diego to San Francisco, or Bodega, can stop at a foreigners' farmhouse almost every few hours, and travel without any knowledge of the Spanish language.
>
> ....The emigration in 1845 amounted to from four to five hundred; from the United States newspaper reports of 1845, from one to two thousand are expected to arrive this August to October (1846).

The economic rewards of settlement in California were, as a glance at Sutter's rich possession showed, tempting. Wheat made an average yield of twenty-five bushels to the acre, and, transported easily down the Sacramento River to San Francisco Bay in launches of fifty tons' burden, sold there for $2.50 a fanega, or about $1.20 a bushel. Land was incredibly cheap, and $200 would buy a square league (5,760 acres) of excellent quality and situation; labor cost little but food and clothing, and no expensive buildings or fences were needed. Frémont also heard that there were numerous American trading ships constantly on the coast. He was told that, in 1842, Monterey had been

Two Views of Sutter's Fort

(The top view is a sketch by Joseph Warren Revere in 1846, from his "Tour of Duty in California"; the bottom view is from Frémont's "Memoirs.")

suddenly seized by a Yankee commodore, Thomas Jones, who had heard an unfounded rumor that the United States and Mexico were at war over Texas, and had hastily run up the American flag. The Mexican Government had taken umbrage at this act of aggression, but the native Californians were little disturbed by it. Not a few of them would have welcomed American sovereignty, as relieving them from atrocious customs burdens, and increasing the value of their lands.

Before Frémont left the Sacramento Valley, he had gained a clear impression of the anomalous state of affairs in this wealthy Mexican province. The white population amounted to some 11,000 or 12,000 people, "descendants," as Consul Larkin said, "of Spanish and Mexican fathers, mostly from native mothers." [1] These Californians were proud to think themselves a distinct and superior element in the loose Mexican federation. Devoted almost wholly to ranching, they lived in rude but comfortable adobe houses, surrounded by the ordinary farm buildings and corrals. The family was usually large; its head was an affable, hospitable man, its sons handsome, high-spirited young blades, finely skilled in horsemanship, and its daughters comely, buxom, virtuous girls. Vaqueros or cowboys, and Indian servants of both sexes, abounded, making the life of the landholder rather indolent.[2] The cattle were branded or earmarked, and the annual matanzas, or round-ups, oc-

[1] Larkin, *Papers*, State Department.

[2] Bryant, *What I Saw in California*, Chs. 21, 22; Walter Colton, *Three Years in California*, 27 ff.

curred in August. The people lived well on beef, mutton, tortillas, vegetables, and the magnificent fruits of the region. They had, however, few luxuries, for the extortionate system of duties made them unattainable. The trade of the country was largely in the hands of a few Boston houses, which sent out cargoes of textiles, shoes, hats, hardware, and "notions," and, keeping their ships two years at a time in the California ports, brought back hides and tallow at an enormous profit.

Lazy, gay, uneducated, the people of California might have led an idyllic life, had it not been that for more than a decade now they had been tormented by opera bouffe wars and petty convulsions, in part springing from, and in part merely accompanied by, a growth of republican sentiment. The Californians, who surpassed the Mexicans in stature, activity, and mental grasp, or at least believed that they did, resented any interference by officers *"de la otra banda."* They had repeatedly shown themselves capable of driving Mexican governors out of the province; in 1836, they had thus revolted against and deposed Governor Nicolas Gutierrez; and under his revolutionary successor, Juan Alvarado, had insisted that California was a free and sovereign state. But for the quarrels between rival families, and the marked jealousy between the northern and southern sections of California, this freedom might have been made absolute. It is a noteworthy fact that American residents had been prominent in the incidents of this little revolution of 1836, the foreigners

in the country siding with and even leading the native Californians in their opposition to Mexico. But Alvarado, whose strength lay in the northern region about Monterey, San José, and San Francisco Bay, had difficulty at first in obtaining the support of the southern district about Los Angeles and San Diego. The Mexicans, in striving to maintain some vestige of their authority, were always able to play upon this ill feeling between the northern and southern parties. Even as it was, by 1840 their grasp upon the province or department was weak and precarious.

When Frémont met the settlers and native Californians of the upper Sacramento, under Sutter's hospitable rooftree or in his excursions through the country, the tide of resentment against the Mexican connection was fast rising toward a new revolt. Two years earlier, the central authorities had made a final effort to place a Mexican governor in power, General Manuel Micheltorena. He was personally disliked, and the Mexican soldiers whom he brought with him, some of them former convicts, were bitterly hated. The talk of independence was becoming steadily more earnest. Everyone felt that the hour was near when California would be launched into freedom like a ship from the stocks. Would she set up as an independent nation, as Texas had done? Would she fall into the hands of the British, who had many traders along the coast, whose Hudson's Bay Company was well established in northern California, and who were believed ready to exchange their

Mexican bonds for the possession of the province? Or would she come under the control of the Americans?

There can be no doubt that Frémont discussed these questions with Sutter, Chiles, Sinclair, and others; above all, with Sutter. The "Governor of the Fortress of New Helvetia," as he liked to be called, had long considered the possibility of himself heading a movement for independence. He had drawn up, to be sent to Washington, a plan for the conquest of the province, under which he was to be given command of the troops and half of the territory conquered.[1] Knowing that the Mexican authorities regarded him with suspicion and hostility, he had taken pains to strengthen his fort by mounting twelve good Russian cannon on his walls, which were six feet thick, and had acquired muskets, rifles, and ammunition for eighty men. When Frémont arrived, there was a garrison of forty uniformed Indians, one always on duty at the gate.[2] Commodore Wilkes had reported that Sutter was "using all his energies to render himself impregnable," and that only his success in doing so prevented the Mexicans from trying to eject him; Larkin had reported that they would like to buy him out. All the Americans who took up land in the Sacramento Valley looked upon his fort as a rallying point in the event of trouble.

Nor was Sutter averse to making occasional threats against the Mexican officials. Resentful when Governor

[1] Cendrars, *L'Or*, 96–97.

[2] John Bidwell, *Out West Magazine*, Vol. 20, p. 183 ff.; Frémont, *Report, Second Expedition*, 354.

Alvarado authorized the Hudson's Bay Company to send trappers along the Sacramento, he wrote an angry letter in which he spoke of his military strength: "The people don't know me yet, but soon they will find out what I am able to do. It is too late now to drive me out of the country; the first step they do against me is that I will make a Declaration of Independence and proclaim California for a Republique independent from Mexico." He breathed defiance, in this letter, against José Castro, a resident of Monterey who was a partisan of Alvarado's, and who became Military Commander of the province. If they leave me alone, he wrote, I will be quiet; "but when this Rascle of Castro should come here, a very warm and hearty welcome is prepared for him." [1] The feelings of many Americans were precisely the same. Most of them had a horror just now of Micheltorena's vicious and ill-controlled soldiery, and were eager to see them expelled from the country.[2]

Doubtless it was a somewhat one-sided view of California life and conditions which Frémont obtained. The American settlers probably spoke somewhat contemptuously of their California-born neighbors. Had Frémont come into contact with such leaders as Alvarado and his relative, General Vallejo, who lived just north of San Francisco Bay, he would have found them men of cultivation, intellectual power, and high character. Had he stayed longer and penetrated toward the coast,

[1] Irving Berdine Richman, *California under Spain and Mexico*, 271.
[2] Royce, *California*, 29.

he would have admired the peaceful and attractive existence which the rancheros led. They were jovial and friendly; their family life was remarkably pure, and the women were possessed of great innate refinement; and into all their works, acts, and speech there entered an element of beauty and artistry. They loved their horses and were perfect Arabs in managing them. They worked in moderation; rode from ranch to ranch a great deal; dressed in gay colors; held pleasant dances and serenaded the belles with old Spanish songs; raced a little, drank more, and gambled a great deal. In fact, with some of them, gaming at monte was a passion, and, when excited, the young men would not only stake all they possessed upon a deal of cards, but would give a note upon some *tio* or uncle, some *prinio* or cousin, the payment of which was made obligatory by family honor.[1] The life of the Californians as a whole was genial, placid, and charming, but it was not such a life as appealed to strenuous American frontiersmen.

It would have been better for all California two years later had Frémont obtained a more sympathetic impression of the Californians, but his time was limited. Two days after he reached Fort Sutter, on March 8, 1844, he pitched his camp at the junction of the American and the Sacramento. On March 22, when he had finished re-equipping his party, he ordered camp broken; and as the first stage of his journey southward, moved to a point near Sinclair's ranch. On the 24th, he re-

[1] J. W. Revere, *A Tour of Duty in California*, Ch. 17.

sumed his progress in earnest. Five of his expedition had, at their wish, been left behind. But in compensation he drove with him a huge cavalcade of animals, numbering one hundred and thirty horses and mules and about thirty head of cattle, including five milch cows. Sutter furnished an Indian lad to help manage the half-wild beasts. The kindly, exuberant Swiss accompanied them for some miles, and as they disappeared in a cloud of dust down the sunburnt valley, he waved them a cordial farewell. He little thought that when Frémont returned it would be to make him prisoner in his own fort.

## CHAPTER XIV

## HOMEWARD OVER THE ROCKIES

FRÉMONT had so planned his homeward journey that he might see the greatest possible amount of new country. He intended to travel five hundred miles south, skirting the western base of the Sierras, to a pass which had been discovered at the source of the San Joaquin River by Joseph Walker, the famous Santa Fé trapper who had served under Bonneville and had broken the trail from Great Salt Lake west across the Great Basin to Monterey.[1] Having crossed the Sierras by this pass, Frémont meant to strike southeast to Santa Fé. This town could be reached by the ancient "Spanish Trail" running across from Los Angeles; but Frémont's design was to halt before actually arriving at the capital of New Mexico, and to turn off into Colorado, where he could make for the headwaters of the Arkansas River.

Simple as the route seemed, it involved two thousand miles of heavy travel, much of it through a rough and semidesert country. There was not a settlement anywhere, and the names of the points and rivers on the way—Indian and Spanish names—showed that few Americans had ever traversed it. But this was precisely

[1] Sabin, *Kit Carson Days*, 119, 120.

the reason why it appealed to Frémont's imagination. It would enable him to trace the Sierra Nevada southward, identify the streams flowing from it to the coast, explore the boundaries of the Great Basin between the Sierras and Rockies, ascertain whether any great rivers other than the Colorado flowed southwest from the Rockies, and examine the southern end of the Great Salt Lake. This program was all carried out.

It was not executed without many hardships, and some adventures of peculiar interest. The first of these incidents occurred in the closing days of April, 1844, soon after they had reached the Spanish Trail, which was still a virgin road with sufficient grass, though the thousands of horses and mules belonging to the annual Los Angeles caravans would soon be on their tracks. High noon of April 24, 1844, found them following the dry bed of the Mohave River, with water to be found only in scattered pools. The country about, save for occasional damp spots overgrown with cottonwood, willow, and acacia, was desert and forbidding. Some poor Mohave Indians whom they had met carried large gourds of water for their journey, an eloquent fact. The explorers knew well that on the route before them they would have to make many a *jornada* of from forty to sixty miles without finding water between their stopping places, and that the trail would be dotted with the bones of wild animals.[1] In preparation for the test

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 368.

awaiting them, they had killed three of their cattle and dried the beef.

On this afternoon of the 24th, they are surprised to see two Mexicans, a grizzled man and a handsome boy of eleven, burst suddenly into camp. Wild, disheveled, and exhausted, they gasp out a terrible story. Their party of six has been traveling from Los Angeles, and, camping unsuspiciously, has been overwhelmed by a hundred hostile Indians, who descended upon them with the yells of fiends and a storm of arrows. These two, who were out guarding the horses, alone escape, and driving what animals they can through the very line of the Indians, ride at their best speed for sixty miles. Leaving their exhausted horses at Tomaso Spring, they continue on foot, hoping to find succor. Panting and weeping, they are overjoyed when Frémont promises to give them every possible assistance. Early the next day, he and his party swing abruptly away from the Mohave River, and soon reach Tomaso Spring on the Los Angeles Trail. They find, as they expect, that the horses are gone; driven away, a swift examination of the ground shows, by the Indians. Frémont feels that he has no business diverting his entire expedition to follow the savages, but he does not object when Kit Carson and the almost equally experienced and hardy scout, Alexander Godey, volunteer to ride on with the older Mexican in pursuit.

The sequel is one of the most striking exploits of which even Carson could boast in his long frontier

career. The horse which the Mexican, Fuentes, is riding, soon fails, and he turns back; but Carson and Godey press on alone. Toward nightfall, the trail enters the gloomy mountains and becomes rougher, but they follow it by moonshine till late at night, when, in a dark and narrow gorge, it becomes too indistinct to trace. Afraid of losing it, they tie their horses to trees and lie down to sleep in the still, inky darkness, not striking a light. At the first glimmer of dawn, they are astir and take the trail again. They have not gone far, and the sun is just beginning to rise, when they discover horses ahead of them. Halting at once, and leading their own mounts back to a hidden point, they creep up cautiously to the crest of a little eminence commanding the Indian encampment. Here they see four large skin lodges pitched among the trees, fires blazing, pots boiling, and the savages gathered about a breakfast feast. At this juncture, a young horse becomes frightened at the grotesque figures of the two creeping men, snorts, kicks up his heels, and betrays them to the Indians. It was a critical moment.

Carson and Godey never hesitate a moment, but, giving a war whoop, charge into the camp, firing point-blank from their rifles. Two Indians fall mortally wounded, and the others, fearing that the boldness of two men who thus attack thirty means a trap, take to their heels. As they go, an arrow passes through Godey's shirt collar, grazing his neck. With a final volley, the scouts turn to the savages writhing on the

ground. Thinking them dead or dying, they strip off their scalps, when they are aghast to see one of the men, though he has received two balls through the body, spring to his feet with a howl of agony. With the blood streaming from his gory head, he is a horrifying sight. An old squaw, possibly his mother, looks back from the mountain side up which she is hurriedly clambering, and pausing hysterically to fling a handful of gravel at the white men, looses a volley of threats and lamentations. Momentarily appalled by the frightful spectacle, Carson and Godey terminate the agonies of the Indian. Then they return hastily upon their trail, and rouse Frémont's camp, Carson shouting and Godey waving the two scalps tied to his gun.

It is evident that Frémont, when he heard of the scalping, had his impulse of compunction and regret, but it was quickly dissipated by what followed.

The expedition continued northeastward, across the dismal, waterless plain that constitutes the semidesert region of California and Nevada; a land hot, rocky, and brown, with no vegetation except prickly cacti, sagebrush, and yucca trees. The desolate region was walled in with forbidding mountain ranges. To escape the pitiless glare of the sun, the expedition adopted the plan of starting late each evening, and traveling all night. It was an unhappy-looking procession that wound through the dusty darkness. Scouts were sent ahead and out on the flanks, the armed men were divided into front and rear divisions, and the animals,

baggage, and horned cattle were driven in the middle, making a dreary cavalcade a quarter mile in length. On April 28th, they were tormented by a heavy gale, which flung the sharp sand in their faces so violently that it was almost impossible to continue, but they camped that night in a green valley, with good grass and springs of clear water. On the following day, setting out early, they soon covered the seven miles of desert which lay between them and the Archilette, or camping ground on the Spanish Trail where the Mexican party had been ambushed. Frémont describes in his usual vivid, nervous English the scene which met their eyes as they rode from the sandy plain to the grassy spot, with its springs and willows:[1]

> The dead silence of the place was ominous; and, galloping rapidly up, we found only the corpses of two men: everything else was gone. They were naked, mutilated, and pierced with arrows. Hernandez had evidently fought, and with desperation. He lay in advance of the willow half-faced tent which sheltered his family, as if he had come out to meet danger, and to repulse it from that asylum. One of his hands and both his legs had been cut off. Giacomo, who was a large and strong-looking man, was lying in one of the willow shelters, pierced with arrows. Of the women no trace could be found, and it was evident they had been carried off captive. A little lap dog, which had belonged to Pab-

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs.*

lo's mother, remained with the dead bodies, and was frantic with joy at seeing Pablo; he, poor child, was frantic with grief, and filled the air with his incessant lamentations for his father and mother. *Mi padre!—mi madre!*—was his incessant cry. When we beheld this pitiable sight, and pictured to ourselves the fate of the two women carried off by savages so brutal and so loathsome, all compunction for the scalped-alive Indian ceased; and we rejoiced that Carson and Godey had been able to give so useful a lesson to these American Arabs, who lie in wait to murder and plunder the innocent traveler.

They were shortly to learn that they were on the borders of an exceedingly hostile Indian country. On May 3, 1844, after following the general line of the present Los Angeles-Salt Lake City Railroad, they reached Las Vegas in Nevada, an empty, marshy basin where two springs, warm but pure, gushed up with great force. Their horses and mules, from want of water and grass, were becoming exhausted, while the continuous flinty rocks were cutting their hoofs to pieces.[1] One by one, they dropped in their tracks and had to be abandoned; the men clipping off their tails and manes, as they gave out, to make saddle girths. On May 4, 1844, the expedition made its hardest day's journey since leaving the Sierras. They had, fortunately, started early, for the skeletons of horses scat-

[1] Frémont, *Report, Second Expedition*, 386.

tered along the trail soon proved that they had a long, parched *jornada* before them—between fifty and sixty miles without a drop of water. Their thirst became almost insupportable. The sun glared down with demoniac fierceness; the hot yellow sand reflected it like a burning glass; waves of sultry heat rolled and shimmered across the desert. Occasionally, they would halt to chop into a cactus of the variety called *bisnaga,* the pulp of which has a slightly acid juice, or they would moisten their mouths by chewing some leaves of sour dock. Hour after hour, they toiled on, expecting always to find water just ahead, and always disappointed. The sun dropped low and sank; the stars came out and still they toiled forward, fatigue and thirst making every step a burden. Finally, near midnight, when they had been on the march sixteen hours, their wild mules suddenly kicked up their heels and began running impetuously ahead. The animals had scented water. Another mile or two, and the party reached a full and rushing stream, the Rio de los Angeles, a branch of the Rio Virgen.

It was here, after they had made camp and settled down for a day's rest, that they were surrounded by Indians who momentarily threatened an attack. At dawn, the savages, jabbering a dialect of the Ute tongue, began emerging from the wild country about and crowding toward the camp. Frémont told the guards to warn them off, kept his men under arms, and had the pasturing horses driven back to camp.

Repeatedly, the Indians made insulting demonstrations, which he felt it best to ignore. Defensively, his position was badly exposed, for though it had the river and some willow thickets on one side, on the other it was commanded by a rocky bluff. The savages were a wretched, treacherous-looking crew. They were naked save for breechclouts; their fashion of gathering their hair into a tight knot at the crown of their heads lent an unnatural and fiendish aspect to their faces; the restless, furtive glare of their eyes, their ill-controlled movements, their evident tendency to act wholly upon impulse instead of upon rational design, made them resemble fierce beasts of prey. Each carried a powerful bow, and a quiver of thirty or forty arrows, each tipped with a clear, translucent stone, a kind of opal, which was nearly as hard as a diamond; and Frémont knew well that at close range these arrows were as effective as a rifle. They would pierce a man's body almost through, and leave him lifeless in an instant.

Just once did hostilities seem likely to begin. In spite of Frémont's strict orders, an old chief—for such he seemed to be—forced his way full-armed into camp. His mien was threatening and provocative. "Why, there are none of you," he said tauntingly. Counting the men about the camp, he tallied twenty-two, and enumerated them on his fingers insultingly. "Only that many," he said, "and we—we are innumerable!" With this, he waved to the hills and mountains about. When the white men pointed to their rifles, he thrust his fingers

into his ears and pretended he could not hear. "If you have your arms," he said a moment later, twanging his heavy bow, "we have ours, too." All this was as much as the hot-tempered Carson could endure. "Don't say that, old man," he exploded; "don't say that—your life's in danger." Probably, as Frémont commented, the old chief was nearer his end than he would be till he actually met it.

They left this spot without mishap, and two days later camped at a point nearly fifty miles distant, on the Rio Virgen, which the leader described as the dreariest river he had ever seen: a deep, rapid, turbid stream, roaring swiftly through a desert country. By this time, they had killed the last steers of their once large drove. The wretched Moapa Indians of the country hung constantly about the expedition, but refused to come into camp. They seemed little better than wild beasts to the white men. Living upon the lizards and other small animals of the rocks, using long hooked sticks to draw them out of their holes, they were cowards, thieves, and in all the most degraded human beings Frémont had ever seen. As the expedition pushed up the Rio Virgen, an increasing pack, like so many wolves, stealthily followed the white men; and whenever Frémont had occasion to double momentarily upon his trail, he found the sandy soil of the river bottom thickly covered with their footprints. It was impossible to leave a tired horse or mule behind for even an hour. The half-starved In-

dians would pounce upon it in an instant and leave nothing but hair and bones. Under these circumstances, they made camp for a day's rest on May 9, 1844, at a spot on the river where there was a considerable patch of grass; and here the first tragedy of the expedition occurred.

Frémont, worn out with his responsibilities, the heat of the day, and some extra labor in arranging his botanical specimens, lay down for an afternoon nap and did not awaken till night. He did not know that before he sought his tent one of his favorite men, Tabeau, had gone back on the trail to seek a lame mule. When the leader arose, Carson came to him with a worried look, reporting that Tabeau should have been back long before. While they were speaking with grave foreboding, they perceived a smoke rise suddenly from a cottonwood grove below. It was an unmistakable token that he was dead, for such signal fires were kindled to tell the Indians about that a blow had been struck. Carson and several others were instantly dispatched down the river on good horses; darkness fell while Frémont nervously paced the camp; and only when night was well begun did the horsemen return, with ominous news. They had come upon the mule lying in a thicket, mortally wounded and left to die that the Indians might butcher it for food, while in another spot not far distant they had found a little puddle of blood. The next morning all their apprehensions were confirmed.[1]

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 381.

....As soon as there was light enough to follow tracks, I set out myself with Mr. Fitzpatrick and several men in search of Tabeau. We went to the spot where the appearance of puddled blood had been seen; and this, we saw at once, had been the place where he fell and died. Blood upon the leaves and beaten-down bushes showed that he had got his wound about twenty paces from where he fell, and that he had struggled for his life. He had probably been shot through the lungs with an arrow. From the place where he lay and bled, it could be seen that he had been dragged to the bank of the river and thrown into it. No vestige of what had belonged to him could be found except a fragment of his horse equipment. Horse, gun, clothes—all became the prey of these Arabs of the New World.

The men under Frémont had become, from long association, like brothers, and there was a general cry of grief and anger. They would willingly have stopped to avenge his death, but the condition of their horses, almost ready to drop for want of grass and rest, forbade any plunge into the unexplored mountains about. The tribe which had done the murder was the same which had been hanging upon the skirts of the expedition. But after this day they disappeared like ghosts, melting into the wilds; they knew they deserved punish-

ment, and instead of the numbers visible before, not one appeared for more than a fleeting glimpse.

Yet this loss marked almost the end of all their hardships and misfortunes. When it occurred, they were camping just west of a mountain gap through which the Spanish Trail wound. As they approached it by a difficult rocky defile, they saw that the nature of the country was swiftly changing. It had been arid, bare of all but the roughest vegetation, and inhospitable; now it became forested with cedar, nut pine, and cottonwood; there was a heavy growth of underbrush, and they perceived with pleasure many birds in the trees. They were entering a country which would furnish grass, game, and good water; they were emerging from the arid regions. On May 11, 1844, the transformation in their surroundings was signalized by a shower of rain, while in the evening, with heavy dark clouds covering the sky, a cold wind sprang up which made overcoats desirable. They were now well within the bounds of the future state of Utah, following the Santa Clara River. On May 12, they arrived at the great camping ground, Las Vegas de Santa Clara (the Spaniards used *vegas* to signify fertile, well-watered meadows, as distinguished from *llanos* or dry and barren flats), where the annual caravan from Los Angeles always halted and recruited for some weeks before pushing on to Santa Fé.

This point, regarded as the terminus of the desert journey from the West, was later named Mountain

Frémont's Men Following the Uncompahgre River
(From Frémont's "Memoirs," Chicago, 1887.)

Meadows, and was the spot rendered forever infamous by the fiendish murder, thirteen years later, of nearly all of a party of Western emigrants by some Mormon fanatics and Indians. Later travelers have found it a dismal place, under the shadow of that crime, but to Frémont's men it was wonderfully fresh and attractive. They were now on a dividing ridge between the waters of the Rio Virgen, flowing south to the Colorado, and those of the Sevier River, flowing north into the Great Basin. Having remained one day for rest, they descended into a broad valley, the water of which was tributary to Sevier Lake, and the next morning, moving northward, came within sight of the high peaks of the Wasatch Range, which sweeps toward Wyoming and looks down, in its northern portion, upon the expanse of Great Salt Lake.

The events of the remainder of their journey were for the most part commonplace. They were shortly joined by the noted hunter and trapper, Joseph Walker, who had been traveling from Los Angeles with the great California caravan just behind them on the Spanish Trail, and who, seeing their fresh camp fires, had guessed their identity. Walker had a more thorough knowledge of this region than any other man living, and Frémont was glad to accept him as a guide. They met also the famous Ute chief called Walker, with his powerful band well-armed with good rifles, journeying slowly toward the Spanish Trail to exact his annual tax from the Los Angeles caravan. A little later, they

lost one of their men, Badeau, by an accident with a gun. On May 24, they approached Utah Lake, and Frémont took time for a cursory examination of this sheet of water. It was unfortunate that he did not make a more thorough investigation, for in his report he later stated that it is connected with Great Salt Lake, of which it is "the southern limb"; though a brief reconnaissance would have made it clear that the Jordan River flows southward *out* of Great Salt Lake, and that a wide belt of land, thirty miles or more across, intervenes between Utah Lake and the larger sheet.[1]

From Utah Lake, Frémont might easily have returned by the well-traveled Oregon Trail, but he was too tireless and curious an explorer for that. Instead, he penetrated the Wasatch and the Uinta Mountains, crossed the Continental Divide through what is now named Muddy Pass, which Frémont called "one of the most beautiful we had ever seen," and turning southward, reached Pueblo, Colorado, on June 28, 1844. On June 1, they were at Bent's Fort, and here Carson and Walker, feeling that their work was done and that they were in their own country, remained. George Bent treated the party with his usual warm hospitality. On the last day of July, they were again at the little town of Kansas on the banks of the Missouri River. After fourteen months of absence from civilization, they were exultant to be back at the familiar scene. They lost no time in resting, but the day following their

[1] Cf. Dellenbaugh, *Frémont and '49*, 271.

arrival took a steamboat and were soon gliding down the broad Missouri. Frémont, with his usual humanity, refused to sell his travel-worn animals, to be scattered over the West for fresh toils and starvation, but placed them in good pasturage on the frontier—to be used in still a third expedition, if he could arrange one.

## CHAPTER XV

## A DRAMATIC HOMECOMING

THE fourteen months following Frémont's departure had been a period of anxious waiting for Jessie. She had spent them, summer and winter, in the restful, roomy Benton mansion, whither the family had soon removed from the Brant house. She could not possibly have heard from him after he reached Fort Hall on the Snake River in late September, 1843; it does not appear that she heard from him at all. Aware of his intention to skirt the Sierras and visit California, she guessed that midwinter might find him in an unexplored and dangerous mountain country. Nevertheless, she hoped that he would be able to return quickly and safely by some warm southern route. As early as January, 1844, she cajoled herself into believing that he might arrive any day, and hopes and fears, anxiety and confidence, struggled together in her mind. Each night a place was set for his supper, and a bed made ready for his arrival; each night a lamp was trimmed and placed near the window, to burn through the darkness. Jessie would lie awake worrying and listening for the quick, firm tread of his foot on the flagging. Then in the morning she would look ruefully

upon her preparations, and take away the little supper table she had kept ready.[1]

The household watched Jessie's increasingly intense alternations of hope and anxiety with concern. During the summer, when Senator Benton had been in Missouri, she had been entirely cheerful. For one thing, Benton insisted that she keep occupied—he had on a previous occasion of the kind set her to work translating Bernal Diaz. For another, he kept the house lively with society. He loved to sit in the long gallery of the parlor floor looking out on the inner courtyard, shaded by fine large acacias, with their clusters of vanilla-scented blooms. Here, with his settee, table, coffee, and fruit, he would hold a morning levee attended by politicians, prominent St. Louis citizens, army officers, and old family friends. In the evening, others would call. St. Louis was growing fast, and its boast of 30,000 people gives an utterly inadequate impression of its importance as the great port of the upper Mississippi, the doorway to the West. The old French town was being shouldered to one side by the hustling American "additions"; the business streets toward the river were taking on a Broadway look; the water front was lined in summer with scores of steamers and alive with roustabouts; the flood of emigrants, traders, trappers, and ranchers, pouring westward was more and more irresistible; Jefferson Barracks had become the chief military post beyond the Alleghenies. All the

[1] Jessie Benton Frémont, *Souvenirs*, 162.

currents of the new life were reflected in the Benton circle.

But Senator Benton had to return to Washington at the end of November, 1843, for the opening of Congress, and thereafter Jessie saw less society. She had two families of relatives, the Brants and the Pottses; she knew the Chouteau family; she knew "Colonel" Dent, whose future son-in-law, Ulysses S. Grant, was a second lieutenant fresh from West Point at Jefferson Barracks; and she knew many of the old French residents. Two young men of whom she had seen a good deal in Washington were much at her house: Montgomery Blair, a lawyer of thirty, who had just risen to be mayor of the city, and his brother, Frank P. Blair, a hot-tempered, able young man who had graduated from Princeton two years earlier, and who was now also practicing law. Her father and their father—Francis P. Blair, the great Jacksonian editor of the Washington *Globe*—had long been intimate. Jessie had also her baby and her invalid mother. But these distractions could not really occupy her. Nor was the news, in March, 1844, that a great explosion had occurred on the warship *Princeton* on the Potomac, and that the bursting of the 225-pounder gun, "The Peacemaker," which killed Secretary Upshur and Secretary Gilmer, had narrowly missed killing her father, who escaped with only an injured eardrum, more than a momentary interruption to her anxiety.

Toward spring, as the trappers and traders came

down the Missouri to get their annual supplies, a rumor—it could hardly be dignified by the name of report—reached Jessie's friends that Frémont had gone up into the high Sierras after winter had closed in, had suffered from severe storms and starvation, and had pushed on and disappeared.[1] This rumor purported to come from Indian sources. Naturally, her friends kept it from Jessie's ears, but she was aware that something was held in reserve under the increasing expressions of tenderness which her family threw about her, and the fact added to her fret.

The early spring in St. Louis reminded her that time was passing; on May 29, with a sinking heart, she realized that Frémont had been absent precisely a year. June—July—the first of August all passed, while her anxiety mounted, and at times she felt moments of despair.

Frémont, journeying impatiently down the bar-choked, snag-filled river, reached the junction of the Missouri and the Mississippi about sunset on August 6, 1844, and remained awake as the boat chugged toward the town. It was after midnight when the levee, marked in the darkness by scattered lights and the lanterns of moored steamboats and scows, came into sight. Some yawning negroes emerged under the August stars upon the wharves; ropes were thrown and missed with a splash, there was an uproar of screaming escape valves and the plunge of wheels backing water; the gangplank

[1] Jessie Benton Frémont, *Souvenirs*, 163.

went down with a rumble, and Frémont was one of the first men ashore. No carriages were available at that hour—two or three o'clock in the morning—and he walked uptown. He passed through sleeping business streets, entered the French quarter, and was soon under the windows of the Benton mansion. Old Gabriel, the coachman, slept on the second floor of the carriage house, and by throwing some pebbles at the open window, Frémont roused him. His first question was whether the family were all well. "Yes, dey's all well," came Gabriel's raucous whisper. "Can you let me in without waking anybody?" asked Frémont. "Is dat really you, and not a ghost?" demanded Gabriel. Frémont repeated his question. "Yes, I can let you in," said Gabriel; "but Mrs. Frémont, she's at Miss Anne's, for Mr. Potts is very sick.'

With that, Frémont turned and hastened off downtown at a brisk walk. Miss Anne was Jessie's cousin; the Reverend Mr. Potts was her husband, living in the parsonage next to the Presbyterian Church. Frémont's first thought was of awakening the family and seeing Jessie. But he recalled that Potts suffered from tuberculosis, and that an alarm in the middle of the night might bring on another hemorrhage. Already there was a faint tinge of rose in the east. The most convenient spot to while away the hours till some servant in the parsonage began to stir was the open lawn in front of Barnum's Hotel, and here he sat down on a bench, watching the stars begin to pale. An employee, seeing

his uniform, came out to offer him a room, and at once recognized the worn explorer.[1] The hotel clerk was insistent that he come up to a bedroom and rest, and Frémont had little inclination to refuse. He knew that the Bentons were well; all his responsibilities and anxieties had rolled from his shoulders like Christian's load; and stretching himself upon his first bed in eighteen months, in a few minutes he was oblivious of the world.

Meanwhile, the coachman Gabriel had risen at the peep of dawn and carried his strange news to the Benton family. He was heard with incredulity. A messenger was hastily dispatched to the Potts house to make inquiries, and awakened Jessie. The incredulity increased. Nobody had seen Frémont except Gabriel, and Gabriel was not certain that the visitor had not been an apparition. The nurse for the baby promptly accepted the ghost theory, and raised a weird lament. At this moment there came a ring at the door, and in walked the tired and emaciated explorer. He had slept long past daybreak at the hotel, and in hurrying to the parsonage had met one St. Louisan after another who stopped to welcome and question him. Even now, he and Jessie were not left alone. The parsonage was thronged with friends of the family, the Blairs and other prominent citizens came in, and Frémont had to hold an impromptu reception before he could breakfast with his family.

Frémont had in his direct charge several members

[1] Jessie Benton Frémont, *Souvenirs*, 164, 165.

of the expedition—the Mexican orphan Pablo, rescued on the Los Angeles trail, a Chinook Indian, and two California Indian boys, Juan and Gregorio, of whom he had to make some disposition. Juan and Gregorio were sent to spend the coming winter on a farm of Benton's near Lexington, Kentucky, and took with them the fine saddle horse, Sacramento, which Frémont had brought from California. The Chinook Indian, whose devouring wish was to see the white men where they were most numerous, accompanied Frémont to Washington, and was educated by the Indian Bureau. As for Pablo, his bright, cheerful ways won the heart of everybody in the Benton household; and as he seemed to become attached to the Senator and his family, he was kept with them. The Mexican minister, General Almonte, offered him transportation home to Mexico, but Pablo wished an American education, and for a time showed ambition and aptitude. Unfortunate, as he grew up he drifted away from the Bentons, fell into dissipated and evil ways, and was finally heard from as a robber chief in the San Joaquin Valley.

After a brief rest, Frémont hurried on with Jessie to Washington, for he was eager to make his report and to lay plans for a third expedition. He found that his old circle at the capital had been almost destroyed by death. Nicollet and Hassler were both dead; the former, after a complete mental breakdown, having passed away alone at a Washington hotel. "After all," wrote Frémont with fine feeling, "it would have been a fitter

end for him to have died under the open sky, and been buried rolled up in a blanket, by the side of some stream in the mountains, than to have had life close in the night and alone at a hotel."[1] Senator Benton's enthusiastic colleague, the tall, benignant Lewis Linn, who came so naturally by his zeal for western development—his grandfather had been one of the first to navigate the Mississippi from Pittsburgh to New Orleans—was also dead, a grievous loss for the plans of all the expansionists.[2] Frémont reported, upon reaching Washington, to General Scott, and made an official call upon the Secretary of War, Wilkins, who was amazed by his youth. Then he settled down to enjoy a short interlude of home life.

There ensued a happy period of social ease, of domesticity, and of congenial work. The young couple lived with the Bentons, whose spacious house gave them ample room. The family dined sometimes alone, sometimes with guests of importance. The evening was spent about the fireplace, the Senator reading or writing, Mrs. Benton, whose health had much improved, though her speech was impaired, sewing, and Frémont studying his notes. At first, he was occupied with mathematical computations, and he was vexed by the multitude of visitors who came to talk to him about Oregon and California, and by the stream of questioning letters. His work, in fact, was for a time almost stopped.

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 412.
[2] Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, II, 485.

To escape interruptions, he rented as a workshop a little wooden cottage of two stories, set well back in enclosed grounds, not far from the Benton home. Here he and his assistant, a young man proficient in astronomy and mathematics, rapidly reduced the calculations of the expedition to order. Then came his report, a much more interesting employment, upon which, as before, Jessie was able to give him invaluable assistance.

They made a delightful and profitable partnership of the undertaking. Frémont would marshal his data the evening before; he was up at dawn, and had a breakfast of coffee and rolls; and punctually at nine Jessie would join him in the workshop. There they would labor uninterruptedly till one o'clock, Frémont dictating and Jessie writing. It was a method congenial to his rapid, enthusiastic mind, and highly favorable to the style of the report. He would plunge ahead, without the interruption which the manual labor of using a pen would have entailed; the necessity of making everything clear to Jessie enhanced the lucidity of his exposition; and her questions upon details, her instinct for the significant, her sense of literary form, were indispensable. She liked the work. "Talking incidents over," says Frémont, "made her familiar with the minuter details of the journey, outside of those we had recorded, and gave her a realizing sense of the uncertainties and precarious chances that attend such travel, and which day and night lie in wait; and it gave her for every day

an object unusual in the life of a woman."

At one o'clock the baby was brought in; Jessie rose from her cramped position; the colored mammy gave them their luncheon of cold chicken, beaten biscuit, and fruit; and off they would go for a walk to the Potomac. On some nights, Frémont would have observations to verify. One or two o'clock in the morning would see him, with his assistant Hubbard and a negro servant, stretched on his back on the flagstone of a neighboring church, watching for the emersion of a particular star. Sometimes he and Hubbard, both young, were noisy. A deacon who lived opposite the church thought it his duty to come to Benton and to tell him that Frémont and two boon companions often came home late from a revel so drunk that Frémont lay down on the church steps and could hardly be roused. Jessie tells us what followed:[1]

> Just then we came in from our after-lunch walk, all fresh and animated. Calling us into the library, my father said in his most dangerously polite way, "There are Mr. and Mrs. Frémont, and I wish you to repeat to them what you have been telling me."
>
> The deacon hemmed and hawed, but my father's stern command, "Repeat it, sir," could not be evaded.
>
> The explosions of laughter which followed from us might have enlightened him—but when the sim-

[1] *Jessie Benton Frémont MSS.*

ple fact was told him, he had to stand a lecture from my father on his looking for the worst motive, and his want of Christian charity.

In the political circles of Washington, with the annexation of Texas now imminent and with California and other Mexican territory a center of public attention, Frémont became suddenly a figure of importance. Benton could not hear enough of his trip or of the springtime beauty of California after the dangerous passage of the Sierras. Parading the lieutenant before his friends, he made him tell of the climate, the splendid scenery, the fruits and flowers, and the manifest natural wealth of the country.[1] When Frémont first reached St. Louis from the West, the presidential campaign of 1844, fought between Polk and Clay, was in full swing. Neither the Democratic candidate nor the Democratic platform demand for the annexation of Texas appealed to Benton. He believed that Van Buren, and not the dark horse Polk, had been entitled to the nomination; he believed that Texan annexation meant an unjust war for the benefit of the slaveholders. The Democratic plank for the "reoccupation" of Oregon did, however, meet his wishes. By the time that Frémont was fairly launched on his winter's work, Polk had been elected, Congress had opened, and the expansionist program was clearly triumphant. Expansion meant the possible acquisition of California, and every practical statesman knew it. The meetings of western con-

[1] *Jessie Benton Frémont MSS.*

gressmen at the Benton home, and their plans to further this object and the retention of Oregon, were resumed.

Frémont, stimulated by this group, took an exuberant pride in writing his report. He felt that he was arguing a case of national importance. There still remained an impression in many quarters, fostered by publications of the day, that the Pacific Northwest was a barren, repellant region. A book just out in London (1844), by an officer of the Hudson's Bay Company, John Dunn, entitled *History of the Oregon Territory and North American Fur Trade,* contained a farrago of nonsensical misrepresentations. It asserted that there was no route from the eastern states to Oregon which could ever furnish facilities for a large overland flow of emigrants; that for hundreds of miles the trails wound over barren ground, where scorching heat alternated with freezing cold; and that, west of the Rockies, the country was broken with towering cliffs, deep ravines, or submerged streams, while the travelers' feet sunk in deep sand or were torn by sharp basaltic rocks. The ornithologist J. K. Townsend, who had been with Nathaniel Wyeth's second expedition to Oregon, and who had published a *Narrative* of it in Philadelphia in 1839, had also greatly exaggerated the difficulties of the Trail —the harsh mountains, the burning sun, and the sirocco air.[1]

Frémont's second report, all of which was shown to Benton, and parts of it to Benton's friends, as it pro-

[1] Cf. Frémont, *Memoirs,* 416, 417.

gressed, was as vivid and readable as the first. There was the same succession of human touches. When the party met the large red ox wandering back on the Oregon Trail, they gathered about him "with all our domestic feelings as much aroused as if we had come in sight of an old farmhouse"; and Frémont would not have him touched, "for I would rather have gone through a starving time of three days than let him be killed after he had successfully run the gauntlet so far among the Indians." He and his men, encountering a Shoshone village, wished to exchange cloth, vermilion, and trinkets for provisions, but found the savages miserably poor. "Several of the Indians drew aside their blankets, showing me their lean and bony figures; and I would not any longer tempt them with a display of our merchandise to part with their wretched subsistence." Again and again the irrepressible spirits of the young explorer crept into the pages. Thus he wrote that when they came down from the Sierras and saw the California forests, "the summer green of their beautiful foliage, with the singing birds, and the sweet summer wind which was whirling about the dry oak leaves, nearly intoxicated us with delight." In his account, not merely of the terrible February passage of the Sierras, and of the crossing of the Nevada desert, but also of such incidents as a battle between the Arapahoe and Ute Indians which he witnessed just southwest of Pike's Peak, his report had narrative verve and color.[1]

[1] Frémont, *Report, Second Expedition*, 419 ff.

His second report being nearly three times as long as the first (it fills more than 300 duodecimo pages of small print), Frémont was able to include descriptions of natural scenes, scientific observations, data on fertility, recommendations for military posts and settlements, thumb-nail sketches of everything from hot geysers to grizzly bears, and random remarks on such subjects as the effects of brandy on a cold night after a hard day's march. He even put in bits of frontier gossip where he found it entertaining. In writing of Great Salt Lake, he paused to describe a little insect larva which was washed up in great numbers on the shore:[1]

> Alluding to this subject some months afterwards, when traveling through a more southern portion of this region, in company with Mr. Joseph Walker, an old hunter, I was informed by him that, wandering with a party of men in a mountain country east of the great California range, he surprised a party of several Indian families encamped near a small salt lake, who abandoned their lodges at his approach, leaving everything behind them. Being in a starving condition, they were delighted to find in the abandoned lodges a number of skin bags, containing a quantity of what appeared to be fish, dried and pounded. On this they made a hearty supper, and were gathering round an abundant breakfast the next morning, when Mr. Walker discovered

[1] Frémont, *Report, Second Expedition*, 203, 204.

that it was with these, or a similar worm, that the bags had been filled. The stomachs of the stout trappers were not proof against their prejudices, and the repulsive food was suddenly rejected.

The same artistic sensitiveness which had marked the first document reappeared. On the flood-widened Platte, during the outward journey, "when at night the broad expanse of water grew indistinct, it almost seemed that we had pitched our tents on the shore of the sea." A little later, he exulted in the morning beauty of the great peaks of Rainier and St. Helens, "the snow being entirely covered with a hue of rosy gold." Later still, he wrote poetically of the mythical Buenaventura, "where in the softer climate of a more southern latitude our horses might find grass to sustain them, and ourselves be sheltered from the rigors of winter and from the inhospitable desert." A mere dry government paper would have done little to advertise to the public the comparative easiness of the Oregon route, the value of Oregon, and the astonishing wealth and attractiveness of California. But this narrative, engrossing from beginning to end, and published just when the public was most curious regarding the Far West, carried its message home.

Frémont completed it late in February; on March 1, 1845, it was formally presented to the War Department; and, on March 3, a Senate resolution called for the printing of 5,000 extra copies. Buchanan, who was

just about to become Polk's secretary of state, declared to his fellow senators that "he had watched with interest the progress of this young gentleman (Lieutenant Frémont), and was satisfied that he was a young gentleman of extraordinary merit, great energy, and ability to serve the country. He deserved encouragement. He should, therefore, move to increase the number of copies to be printed from 5,000 to 10,000." [1] This was carried. A series of publishers took up the book, and in the next five years one commercial edition after another appeared, some running into thousands of copies. The newspapers seized instantly upon it, and printed copious extracts. Frémont found himself one of the heroes of the hour.

One recognition which especially gratified him was a double brevet, as first lieutenant and captain, granted by General Winfield Scott "for gallant and highly meritorious services in two expeditions commanded by himself." Another was an invitation to dinner from Daniel Webster, the great Whig leader being deeply interested in California. Webster held that San Francisco Bay and the other Pacific ports should by all means be made American—they were "twenty times as valuable to us as all Texas"—but despite Frémont's protests he thought the interior of California almost valueless.

Soon after the inauguration of Polk, Senator Benton took his son-in-law to the White House to meet

[1] *Congressional Globe*, March 3, 1845.

the tall, suave Tennesseean, and to lend support to Benton's own views on the value of the Far West. Frémont gave the President a brief account of his observations in Oregon and California, and insisted upon the value of these regions to England or America. To illustrate the prevalent ignorance of the western slope, he remarked that he had shortly before visited the Library of Congress, and drawn from the map stand a map which represented the Great Salt Lake as connected with the Pacific by three large rivers; one emptying into the Columbia, one into the Gulf of California, and one flowing west through the Sierra Nevada into San Francisco Bay. Frémont explained that the trappers gave the geographers inexact and conflicting information, which, combined with some known facts and such fables as that regarding the Buenaventura, resulted in such ridiculous maps. His remarks were intended to indicate the propriety of giving the West just such scientific examination as he was furnishing. But the conservative-minded Polk was not impressed as the Captain wished. He evidently held the map makers in high respect. "Like the Secretary [of the Navy]," writes Frémont, "he found me 'young,' and said something of the 'impulsiveness of young men,' and was not at all satisfied in his own mind that these three rivers were not running there as laid down." The young explorer came away somewhat glum.

## CHAPTER XVI

# WAR CLOUDS AND THE THIRD EXPEDITION

FRÉMONT, though he had little aptitude and less taste for the work of the practical politician, was in all this something more than a passive instrument in Benton's hands. He had a warm enthusiasm for California, and already he wished to make it his home. He saw this rich and fertile region hanging like a ripe fruit, ready to break from its stem at any moment. Its forests, its fields, its teeming fisheries, its harbors, were all virtually unused. The greater part of it was lying waste, a mere Indian country, and receiving not even a dribble of Mexican colonization. Of its white population, not yet sufficient to fill a really thriving township, the native Californians were disloyal and discontented, while the fast-growing American group was only biding its time till it would rebel. Plots and intrigues swept the scattered settlements like wind gusts playing over an exposed pond.

Every circumstance at Washington now favored the development of Frémont's still somewhat vague plans, for the chief officers of the Government were eager to seize any opportunity of acquiring California. Polk wished to obtain the whole Southwest; by peaceful ne-

gotiation and purchase from Mexico, if possible, but by force if Mexico went to war over the Texas question. George Bancroft, who had just become Secretary of the Navy, took the same attitude. Indeed, his zeal for the acquisition of California dated further back than Polk's. Senator Benton's group of expansionists was exultant, though its leader took a position which was in some respects peculiar.

Benton felt, with his usual marked opinionativeness, that the United States and Mexico ought to be close friends, and that America should take the attitude of a protector toward the weaker Mexican nation. It would be shameful, he held, to assail Mexico with predatory aims. But he believed that Texas and California could and should be obtained by treaty and purchase. Between Benton and some members of the new Polk Administration, the relationship was very close. The Secretary of State, Buchanan, frequently called to confer with the Senator, and sometimes Frémont was included in their councils. Buchanan was ignorant of Spanish, he did not wholly trust his departmental staff with important state papers—a leak to the British legation had been discovered—and he brought his more confidential Mexican documents to the Bentons to be translated. These dispatches were read and discussed in the security of the Benton library, and translations were made by Jessie and her older sister.

As Frémont completed his report and the Polk Ad-

ministration took up the reins of government in the spring of 1845, war with Mexico seemed to be growing more and more imminent. At the beginning of March, Congress passed a joint resolution providing for the annexation of Texas, for which Benton voted, and against which Señor J. N. Almonte, the Mexican minister, made a protest in terms which threatened hostilities. Mexico immediately broke off diplomatic relations. When the Mexican press learned, in the middle of July, that Texas had accepted the American terms of annexation, a burst of passion shook the southern republic. "Union or war!" became the watchword sounded by the Mexican press.[1] Public anger compelled the Mexican Government to propose to Congress a declaration of war. An army was mobilized, money was appropriated, and steps were taken to raise $15,000,000. Vera Cruz, with new guns mounted on its fortress, was placed in readiness for hostilities. On the northern border, at Matamoras, munitions and provisions were accumulated. From many points in Mexico came news of the assembling and concentration of troops. At the close of July, Mexico notified her Ministers in London and Paris that she intended to appeal to arms. In Washington, so well-informed an observer as Baron Gerolt, who had long been Prussian minister in Mexico City, believed that war was at hand, and told Secretary Bancroft so.[2]

Yet the final steps were not taken to make good the

[1] Justin H. Smith, *The War with Mexico*, I, 87.
[2] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 421.

threat of hostilities; and as the weeks passed, the hope asserted itself in Washington that war might be avoided. The United States took a passive attitude, waiting for Mexico to provoke the first clash.

American leaders, in short, during the weeks in which Frémont was preparing his third expedition, were left in uncertainty. At any moment the Mexican Army, acting upon the principle that Texas was merely a rebellious Mexican province, might cross the border and begin hostilities. Polk had dispatched an agent, W. S. Parrott, to Mexico City to attempt to smooth over the difficulties, and his Cabinet had resolved to reopen diplomatic relations at the first opportunity, and to offer $40,000,000 to Mexico, if necessary, for a satisfactory boundary.[1] England and France manifested a deep concern over the possibility of war, which they knew would inevitably result in an aggrandizement of American territory. They were willing to use their friendly offices. Yet the rumors of immediate war persisted. Warlike measures were being steadily pursued by the Mexican Government. Benton, Bancroft, Buchanan, and Frémont, talking the situation over, felt that the chances of peace or hostilities in the near future might be decided as by the toss of a coin.

Backed by the influence of Benton, who was chairman of the Senate Military Committee, and by Secretary Bancroft, Frémont had found no difficulty in obtaining the approval of the War Department for a third ex-

[1] Smith, *The War with Mexico*, I, 90, 91.

ploratory expedition. These two men were mainly responsible for the decision that it should carry him far into Mexican territory. Frémont was to go to that section of the central Rockies in which the Arkansas, the Rio Grande, and the Colorado all find their sources; he was to examine the Great Salt Lake and the surrounding territory, and he was then to survey the vast chains of mountains west of the Rockies—the Sierras in California and the Cascade Range in Oregon—with a view to the discovery of passes through them to the Pacific. Since American emigration was increasing, and since it was not improbable that the whole Pacific slope would soon fall into the hands of the United States, a knowledge of the means of communication was important.

But "in arranging this expedition," Frémont remarks, "the eventualities of war were taken into consideration." [1] In other words, Benton, Secretary Bancroft, and perhaps also Secretary Buchanan, had in mind the possibility that when he reached California, Frémont might transform his company of scouts and scientific assistants into a company of hard-fighting troops, around which the American settlers of the Pacific Coast could rally.

In his *Memoirs,* Frémont unfortunately treats this aspect of his third expedition without detail and without corroborative documents. He asserts that Bancroft was one of the primary agents in the plan for combining

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs,* 422.

scientific with military objects. "Imbued with the philosophy of history," Frémont says of the Secretary of the Navy, "his mind was alive to the bearing of the actual conditions, and he knew how sometimes skill and sometimes bold action determine the advantages of a political situation; and in this his great desire was to secure for the United States the important one that hung in the balance. In the Government at Washington he was the active principle, having the activity of brain and keen perception that the occasion demanded. With him Mr. Benton had friendly personal relations of long standing." Certainly Bancroft, as he himself stated later,[1] was at this time the "active principle" of the Government in all plans relating to California, a region which he made his particular charge. The secretary, now almost forty-six years old, had already won national renown by his contribution to the *North American Review* and the first volumes of his *History of the United States.* A man of enormous energy and equally enormous enthusiasm for American ideals, he had thrown himself heart and soul into the administration of the Navy, though it was an uncongenial post.[2] He was resolved to use the office, if he could, for the expansion of American territory and the improvement of sectional relations. California fell within his province because it was regarded as a probable bone of contention between the British and American Navies.

[1] *Century Magazine,* Vol. 19, New Series, 924; Bancroft's letter.
[2] M. A. De Wolfe Howe, *Life and Letters of George Bancroft,* I, Ch. 5.

Frémont tells us that if Mexico went to war with the United States, she would wish British protection for California; that "our relations with England were already clouded, and in the event of war with Mexico, if not anticipated by us, an English fleet would certainly take possession of San Francisco Bay." This was possible. He adds that: "My private instructions were, if needed, to foil England by carrying the war now imminent with Mexico into the territory of California." [1] This statement, unfortunately, he does not elaborate. He does not say under just what circumstances, or in just what words, Bancroft, talking with the Benton circle, gave him these "private instructions." Nor does he take note of the fact that Bancroft was not his official superior. Later, we shall record Bancroft's own statements endorsing those of Frémont.

On August 3, 1845, Frémont's third expedition was at Bent's Fort on the Arkansas. He had been given a more generous fund than previously, and "in view of uncertain conditions the force was suitably increased." It consisted of sixty well-armed, experienced, self-reliant men, equal to any emergency.

Frémont had some amusing difficulties in recruiting his company in St. Louis. The St. Louis *Weekly Reveillé* of June 9, 1845, says: "Yesterday we found ourselves, with others, near the enclosure opposite the Planters' Warehouse, endeavoring to hear what Capt. Frémont's ideas were in relation to his contemplated

[1] *Century Magazine*, Vol. 19, New Series, p. 919.

mountain expedition. He was, at the time, attempting to address a motley crowd of French, Irish, Dutch, and Mountain men, to the number of several hundred, who had surrounded and were importuning him to obtain the much desired 'diamond gudgeon' of this government affair. The Captain was disposed to gratify them, and accordingly mounted the most convenient rostrum, which was near—the old rickety fence which bounds the enclosure. He had commenced and was going on with his remarks, which could not be heard, however, excepting by those who were immediately crowding round him, when a sudden pressure of the crowd broke down the fence, and over went the crowd, Captain, and all embracing their mother earth. About this time, a well-meaning Irishman, who had been standing on the corner of Second Street, not knowing what all the fuss was about, rushed up with the idea that it was a 'big fight,' shouting at the top of his lungs, 'Fair play! Fair play! and be d—d to yez; don't you see the man's down?' "

Later, the reporter heard fragmentary sentences of Frémont's speech: "Those who desire to go—fifty men —good riflemen and packers—been to the mountains before—are not such—discharge them before I get up." He says that Frémont's description of the hardships "took the *starch* out of many a good fellow."

Frémont had purchased a dozen of the finest rifles on the market, and offered them to his corps as prizes

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 424.

for the best marksmanship.[1] Obviously, sixty men were an excessive force for a mere topographical party, and sharpshooting is not a topographical necessity. The party included many of Frémont's old comrades, among them the two distinguished frontiersmen, Joseph Walker and Alexander Godey, and the Captain's favorite French voyageur and aide, Basil Lajeunesse; while this time twelve Delaware Indians, good hunters and brave men, were taken along. Lieutenant Abert of the Topographical Corps, a relative of its head, and James McDowell, a nephew of Jessie's, were members. Frémont found that the horses and mules which he had left pasturing near the site of the future Kansas City were in fine condition, fat and rested.

One man was conspicuous by his absence: Preuss, whose wife had persuaded him to buy a home in Washington and insisted that he remain there, though he ardently longed to rejoin Frémont.[1] His place was taken by Edward M. Kern, of Philadelphia, who had eagerly applied for the post; a gay, headstrong young artist whose skill in sketching from nature, and in drawing and coloring birds and plants, made him a valuable addition to the party. Kern was to play a rôle in California far more important than anyone dreamed. As for Carson, Frémont sent a messenger posthaste from Bent's Fort to the scout's new ranch on the Cimarron, where he and Richard Owens were launching into stock raising on a large scale. Carson was tilling,

[1] *Jessie Benton Frémont MSS.*

planting, and building with the zeal of a man who, now tired of roving, happily married, and with children in prospect, hopes to settle down to a life of quiet industry. But though he had resolved to change his mode of life, the message from Frémont instantly caused him to abandon his plans. Doubtless it warned him that war was about to break out, and that he would be expected to fight as well as to serve as a guide; the pay was poor and the danger great, but without delay he sold his ranch at a loss, placed his wife with friends, and took Owens with him to Fort Bent.[1]

It was a sufficient recommendation for Owens that he was Carson's friend. "Cool, brave, and of good judgment," says Frémont in his *Memoirs;* "a good hunter and good shot; experienced in mountain life, he was an acquisition, and proved valuable throughout the campaign." Indeed, upon three men, Carson, Owens, and Godey, Frémont in the anxious days just ahead placed his chief reliance. They were shrewd, quick, and resolute. Under Napoleon, said the young leader, they might have become marshals. Within a year, Owens was to be captain of the first company of Colonel Frémont's First California Battalion, and in that capacity he was to distinguish himself by valiant and loyal service.

August was drawing near a close when Frémont, with his sixty men, his two hundred horses, and a few cattle for food, rode out westward from Bent's Fort

[1] Sabin, *Kit Carson Days,* 238.

Fort Laramie

(From Frémont's "Memoirs," Chicago, 1887.)

in a heavy cloud of dust. Abert was no longer with him, having led a smaller detachment on a reconnaissance into northern Texas, whence he was to turn east to the lower Arkansas River, and then return up the Mississippi to St. Louis. The young Brevet Captain was in absolute command of what was to all effects a little army. His order, "Forward, march!" marked the beginning of two years whose adventures, perils, triumphs, and humiliations were to make him one of the most famous figures of his generation.

Until the expedition reached the eastern foothills of the Sierras, its journey was uneventful and prosperous. It crossed the plains in the delightful weather of late summer, and the men found them beautiful, with the country fresh and green, broken by aspen groves, pine woods, and clear, cool streams rushing over rocky beds. Early in September, the party were on the shores of the Great Salt Lake, where Frémont spent almost a fortnight sketching the geographical features of the country, taking astronomical observations, and making careful explorations. He found great beds of mineral or rock salt; he traversed the environs of the lake on horseback; and at Antelope Island, near its southern extremity, he had an interesting encounter with a grizzled old Ute chief, who declared himself the owner of the game thereabouts, and required Frémont to pay him in red cloth, tobacco, and hardware for the meat he had taken.[1]

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 431.

West of Salt Lake, the course seemed to lie over a flat, arid plain, concerning which neither Walker nor Carson knew anything whatever, and which no white man save the ubiquitous Jedediah Smith had ever crossed. The Indians declared that they knew no one who had traversed it, and that parties had ventured far out without finding a drop of water anywhere. But Frémont thought of a shrewd expedient. At the far edge of the desert, sixty miles away, faintly loomed up a high-peaked mountain, which looked verdurous, and which he thought he could safely reach. He arranged that Carson and two others should set out in the coolness of the night, taking a pack mule with water, and should make the mountain by a single forced march. On the following day, Frémont and his companions should follow more leisurely, try to reach a halfway point, and wait for a smoke signal in the event that Carson found water. Two days later, the whole expedition was at the foot of the peak, where it found water, grass, and wood abundant, and where the animals could be turned loose. A few years afterward, emigrants began passing regularly by this route, which they called the Hastings Cut-off. Frémont's horses had now become what the voyageurs called *resté,* having reached a point at which they were easily overfatigued; but the mules, however tired at night, needed only plenty of good grass and water to be as fresh as ever in the morning.

At the beginning of November, the expedition, finding easy passes from valley to valley, continued its jour-

ney westward across Utah. It was an arid region, but they spread scouts out over the country on every day's march, and seldom had difficulty in finding a comfortable camping place by some stream or spring. When Frémont reached the picturesque river which had theretofore been called the Ogden, after the famous fur trader Peter Skene Ogden, but which he renamed the Humboldt in honor of the great geographer, he divided his party. One body, under Kern, was to follow the Humboldt to its termination in the Carson Sink, was to go on to the eastern foot of the Sierras, and was then to follow the mountains southward till it reached a body of water which Frémont called Walker's Lake. Frémont had appointed Joseph Walker as guide to the party, and he felt secure as to its safety, for in following the river and the Sierras it could not go astray, while it would have ample grass and water to keep the animals in good condition throughout its journey.

As for himself, Frémont took ten picked men, including several of the Delawares, and set out from the Humboldt River directly across the bed of the Great Basin, westward with a slight inclination to the south. Carson, of course, accompanied him. By splitting the expedition into two parts, Frémont doubled the information obtained. Since "the winter was not approaching, and I had good reason to know what the snow would be in the Great Sierra," he thought it imprudent to linger longer in examining the Great Basin. But, as Dellenbaugh suggests, if this had been purely an ex-

plorative party, it would have been much better for it to spend the winter mapping the almost unknown regions east of the Sierras than to hurry on to the well-known coastal belt of California. Why did he not stay, find a suitable base, and study all the problems of the Great Basin at leisure? The obvious answer is that it was not a mere explorative party. One of its objects was to carry out a military reconnaissance in California, to be at hand in that desirable territory if hostilities broke out, and to give the American settlers on the Sacramento assurances of aid.[1]

The passage of the Great Basin was dull and eventless, though it added something to human knowledge of one of the most obscure parts of America. Once they happened upon a naked Indian, cooking a stew of sagebrush squirrels, killed with his obsidian arrows, over a sagebrush fire; and though the Delawares would have killed him, Frémont sent him away with a small present. On another occasion, they had encamped for the night at a spring, had supped upon antelope, and were lying about the fire smoking when they were startled by an unexpected apparition. Frémont's record of it is a good illustration of his eye for the picturesque:[2]

> Carson, who was lying on his back with his pipe in his mouth, his hands under his head, and his feet to the fire, suddenly exclaimed, half rising and pointing to the other side of the fire: "Good God!

[1] Dellenbaugh, *Frémont and '49*, 295.
[2] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 436, 437.

Look there!" In the blaze of the fire, peering over her skinny, crooked hands, which shaded her eyes from the glare, was standing an old woman apparently eighty years of age, her grizzled hair hanging down over her face and shoulders. She had thought it a camp of her people, and had already begun to talk and gesticulate, when her open mouth was paralyzed with fright, as she saw the faces of the whites. She turned to escape, but the men had gathered about her and brought her around to the fire. Hunger and cold soon dispelled fear, and she made us understand that she had been left by her people at the spring to die, because she was very old and was no longer good for anything. She told us she had nothing to eat and was very hungry. We gave her immediately about a quarter of the antelope, thinking she would roast it by our fire, but no sooner did she get it in her hand than she darted off into the darkness. Some one ran after her with a brand of fire, but calling after her brought no answer.

Frémont's route led him through the central portion of Nevada. Striking southwest from Franklin Lake, he skirted what is now known as the Alkali Desert, penetrated Nye County, and proceeded west through Esmeralda County to Walker's Lake, which lies near the western boundary of Nevada, its southern tip just opposite Sacramento. In making this trip, he blazed

the most feasible trail of the time across Nevada. Theretofore, maps and geographical texts had represented the whole Great Basin, from the Salt Lake to the Sierras, as a sandy, barren plain, without water or grass. Frémont proved, as he wrote Jessie, that instead of a plain, it was "traversed by parallel ranges of mountains, their summits white with snow (October); while below, the valleys had none. Instead of a barren country, the mountains were covered with grasses of the best quality, wooded with several varieties of trees, and containing more deer and mountain sheep than we had seen in any previous part of our voyage." Had later events not obscured Frémont's exploratory labors of 1845, these facts would have attracted wide attention.

On November 24, Frémont, after this unexciting passage, found himself at the rendezvous on Walker's Lake, where three days later the main party joined him. The weather was still open and beautiful, but the temperature was growing sharply chill; even during the journey across the Basin, the thermometer had stood below the freezing point at sunrise, and now the cold of the grim Sierras, looming above them to the west, was in the air. The members of the expedition were in overflowing spirits and health. But game was becoming scarce as the wild animals denned themselves up or migrated southward for the winter, and their store of provisions was falling low. A brief storm, whitening the lower hills and valleys of the ranges with a few inches of snow, had warned them of the difficulties if

they delayed. Frémont was not far from the point at which he had forced a crossing of the Sierras the previous winter, and he meant to conquer them again at once. He knew that heavy snows might be expected at any moment to block the passes; and that if they came, he could not possibly extricate the baggage of his force. He therefore resolved again to divide his party, sending the main body under Kern south along the Sierras until, opposite southern California, they could pass through open valleys, known to Walker, where snow was rarely or never seen. He himself would go directly over the mountains, and the two bodies would reunite at the Lake Fork of the Tulare Lake.

Leaving behind him the Great Basin, which he had branded with "the Frémont irons"—Humboldt River and Mountains, Basil Creek, Sagundai Spring, Walker's River and Lake, Owens Lake [1]—the young Captain successfully carried out this program. With fifteen selected men, Frémont at the beginning of December reached the Salmon Trout River flowing into Pyramid Lake, and four days later was standing on the east side of the familiar pass in the Sierras. He had succeeded in his effort to reach it before the first heavy fall of snow. Nervous even yet lest the party be overtaken by a blizzard, he kept a close watch all the night of December 4, so that at the first swirl of snowflakes they might hurry on to gain the crest before it was too late. Happily the sky continued clear, and

[1] Sabin, *Kit Carson Days*, 245.

when they reached the pass the only snow visible was that shining on the high peaks above. Reaching the middle of the divide, they found the temperature surprisingly mild—only 22 degrees—and began the descent into the warm California plains.

It was again a delightful experience, after the scorched, broken plateau of the Great Basin, to come out into the lovely rolling country just west of the Sierra pinnacles. First they passed through great pine forests, the columns high overtopping any pines of the East or of Europe; then they came down into a region wooded with varieties of oak, bearing an abundance of acorns which the Indians used for food. The long-acorn oak rose to a height of eighty feet, and was frequently six feet in diameter. Here in the foothills rain fell frequently, and everything bore a green, well-watered aspect. Many small Indian villages were scattered through the oak glades, and Frémont noted their little mills, or rather mortar holes, for pounding acorns; idyllic spots, where the clean, smooth granite rocks stood out amid the fresh green grass, and the running water pleased the ear and eye. So attractive was the whole region, with its flowers, its game, and its other temptations to man and beast, that they camped early every afternoon to enjoy it, and so consumed four days in coming down to the Sacramento bottoms.

On December 9, 1845, Frémont was once more approaching the thick adobe walls of Sutter's Fort on the American River, and was being welcomed by the wav-

ing hands of the ranch employees, clustered in the gateway. With his entrance to the fort, there begins one of the most eventful and momentous chapters of his history. He little realized that, as he wrote later, "my path of life had led out from among the grand and lovely features of Nature, and its pure and wholesome air, into the poisoned atmosphere and jarring circumstances of conflict among men, made subtle and malignant by clashing interests." [1]

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 602.

## CHAPTER XVII

## THE CLASH WITH CASTRO

THE events of the twelve months following Frémont's second entry into California constitute, with the exception of his hundred days as Commander of the West in 1861, the most controversial part of his career. He has been extravagantly praised and extravagantly blamed. On the one hand, his admirers long depicted him as the Clive of California, the young officer whose prompt and fearless action in an international crisis, against formidable odds, conquered the region for the United States. This legend of Frémont's gallant conquest made him the Republican nominee for President ten years later. On the other hand, he has been harshly criticized by successive historians as a selfish and irresponsible mischief-maker, a man who led a brutal assault upon an unoffending people, and whose schemes of selfish aggrandizement inflicted grave injury upon the inhabitants of California, while they placed an ugly blot on the American flag. One of these critics is H. H. Bancroft; another is the California historian, Theodore H. Hittell. The most severe is Josiah Royce, who in his volume on California treats Frémont with a hostility that at some points is almost venomous. The fact that his denunciation of Polk and

the Cabinet, and his excoriation of the whole Mexican War, are almost equally shrill and extreme, serves—in view of our recent realization of Polk's high abilities and integrity, and of the justifiable nature of the Mexican War—to cast doubt upon his interpretation of Frémont's acts. A calm review of the events of 1846 will show that the young explorer was neither a grand histrionic hero, a conquistador of the Far West, nor a selfish and abandoned villain. Fate cast him to play a large part in the acquisition of California, but not larger than that of two or three other men; he played it with his usual impetuosity and dash, but according to his best lights, and he played it, on the whole, well.

In judging Frémont's acts and appraising his motives, we must scrutinize an intricate complex of factors: the attitude of the Mexican officials in California, the feelings of the native Californians, in both the northern group and the southern group, the supposed menace of British action, the temper of the American settlers on the Sacramento, the position of the 20,000 Indians, and the instructions of the Navy Department, the War Department, and the State Department. We must remember that one element in this confusing equation is and always must be unknown: the precise nature of the verbal instructions given Frémont by Bancroft and Benton, and his consequent understanding of the unwritten wishes of the more aggressive members of Congress and the Polk Administration.

In the three months and more which had elapsed dur-

ing Frémont's journey from Bent's Fort to the Sacramento, much had happened in Washington and Mexico City. The two nations throughout the summer had continued on a footing which made peace seem decidedly less probable than war. Then, in October and early November, the skies brightened astonishingly. The Mexican Government was asked whether it would receive an American envoy, empowered to adjust all disputes between the two countries, and replied that it would. President Polk and his Cabinet decided to dispatch at once John Slidell, of Louisiana, an able lawyer and capable diplomat, with a good knowledge of Spanish, to act as minister. Instructions were prepared, and Slidell was empowered to offer $5,000,000 for New Mexico, $25,000,000 for enough of California to include Monterey, and $20,000,000 more for enough of California to include San Francisco.[1] In his annual message of December 2, 1845, Polk was able to tell Congress that Mexico had consented to diplomatic relations, that he had found a suitable minister, and that, till the result was known, he would recommend no measures for a redress of American grievances. On the day when this message reached Congress, Frémont was just preparing to cross the crest of the Sierras into California.

But these bright hopes were dashed to the ground immediately after the New Year. Information was received in Washington on January 12, 1846, which ren-

[1] George P. Garrison, *Westward Expansion 1841–1850*, 214, 215.

dered it almost certain that the Mexican Government would refuse to receive Slidell. Herrera and his Cabinet wished to enter upon negotiations, but the opposition at home and the danger of a revolution were such that they did not dare. Polk at once acted decisively. On January 13, he ordered the American troops under Zachary Taylor to advance to the Rio Grande. Taylor at once brought his army into shape and, marching from Corpus Christi on March 8, reached Point Isabel on the 24th. Meanwhile, Herrera had been overthrown by the new government of Paredes, but this did not alter the situation in Mexico City for the better. Popular hatred for the United States ran so high that the new President, insecure in his tenure, felt no better able to negotiate than the old one. Mexican anger had been aroused by reports that the United States was bent upon the acquisition of California, either through armed aggression or as a territorial indemnity in settlement of Mexican debts to America; and when Slidell made a final demand to be received, the Government on March 15, sent him a peremptory refusal. Taylor was now on the march to the Rio Grande, and the opening of war was at hand.

Naturally, Frémont knew nothing of all this. He could make only the vaguest guesses, and this fact goes far to explain his erratic course of the next few months, his time-killing marches and countermarches, his defiance of the California authorities, followed by a retreat

and then by a new and more belligerent advance into their territory.

When on December 9, 1846—the warm December of that country, hot at noonday, chill at night—Frémont and Kit Carson rode up together to Fort Sutter, he had already made his encampment at Grimes's ranch, some three miles above on the beautiful American River. At the fort they found that Sutter was absent on business somewhere along San Francisco Bay, and that John Bidwell, an employee who had come out to California five years earlier, was in charge. Frémont at once asked for supplies—sixteen mules, a half-dozen packsaddles, some flour, and other provisions—saying that he wished to set out southward at once to meet the main body of his expedition under Kern. Here he met his initial disappointment. Bidwell told him that no mules were available, and that although he could have the packsaddles and some foodstuffs, he could get nothing better than half-wild horses at the fort. It appears that Frémont's temper flared up at this. Suspecting that Bidwell was lying, and that he was actuated by fear of the Mexican authorities, he muttered a few angry words to Kit Carson and rode hastily away without saying good-by. Bidwell followed, expostulating that he would do anything in his power to assist the expedition, and explaining that Sutter's ability to supply mules the previous year had arisen from a lucky purchase of a hundred good animals from Peter Lassen, a ranch

[1] John Bidwell, *MS. Recollections*, 152–154.

owner farther north on the Sacramento;[1] but to no avail.

Not until Sutter returned was Frémont convinced that Bidwell's position did not reflect the hostility of the Mexican officials, and that the Fort was actually as friendly and hospitable as ever. Sutter told him that the sudden transit of the American expedition the previous year had caused great excitement in Mexican circles. It had been necessary for the good Swiss to explain to Governor Manuel Micheltorena that the party was engaged in a peaceable geographical survey of American territory, and that it had been compelled to cross the Sierras into the Mexican domain to obtain food and other supplies at Sutter's Fort.[1] Once Frémont grasped the situation, he went down to San Francisco Bay to see if mules and supplies were obtainable there, but his trip was without much success, and he was constrained to accept Sutter's horses after all.

Having done this, he set out southward, with his sixteen men, his transport animals, and some cattle, to hunt up the main body of his expedition. A search along the San Joaquin Valley as far as the headwaters of Tulare Lake Fork failed to reveal Kern's men. Frémont was surprised but not alarmed, for he knew that the party was too strong to have met any disaster, and concluded that they had loitered along the way to hunt the abundant game. Thus reassuring himself, he returned to

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 441.

Sutter's Fort, which made a convenient headquarters until Kern should rejoin him.

Frémont's plan was to take his expedition, as soon as it was reunited, up the eastern branch of the Sacramento, past Klamath Lake, and on into the lovely Willamette Valley. He would thus have blazed a new, and, as he believed, a wholly superior, trail from the Missouri to the Oregon country. He could boast that he could travel from the Fontaine qui Bouit River to the Sacramento in thirty-five days or less, over a road materially better for wagons than any then in use; while from Sutter's Fort he could travel northward on an admirable natural highway, instead of the rocky, mountainous path which emigrants on the Oregon Trail took down the Snake and the Columbia. His pride in this new road he confided to Jessie in a letter written at Yerba Buena on San Francisco Bay on January 24, 1846.[1] The letter bubbled over with joy in his discovery that the supposedly desert Great Basin was well furnished with forests, succulent grass, and trees; he spoke only of errands of peace, and of his contentment at having accomplished so much of his task. "Many months of hardships, close trials, and anxieties have tried me severely," he concluded, "and my hair is turning gray before its time. But all this passes, *et le bon temps viendra.*" He seemed to be thinking only of quiet fireside pleasures.

Actually, he was thinking constantly of the political

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 452, 453.

situation and the possibilities which it might offer for some daring and memorable blow for the conquest of California. He felt himself treading a stage on which history might at any moment be made. It was obviously to his interest to wait until he could take some effective cue. He might have made haste to find the remainder of his party, supplied himself with what animals and stores he could find at Sutter's Fort and on San Francisco Bay, and pushed on north. The way was easy; game was obtainable, and when spring opened he could be at the Oregon posts, where he could further refit. But with his own and Benton's ambitions in mind, he was loath to depart. He might hear of war on the coast, or receive instructions from Washington for some decisive blow. He decided to obtain permission, under the pretext of requiring fuller camp equipment, to visit some of the principal Mexican settlements. Leaving his party at Sutter's Fort, he set out for Monterey, where if anywhere he could learn the latest news.

Equipped with a passport from Sutter, who was a Mexican magistrate, and with the loan of Sutter's launch, Frémont soon made his way down the Sacramento and across country to his goal. Monterey, ninety miles below San Francisco,[1] was the gayest and most important town of California, though the seat of government had recently been transferred, under pressure from the southern party, to the rival center, Los Angeles. The treasury, customhouse, and military head-

[1] For clarity, we shall hereafter call Yerba Buena, then still the merest hamlet, San Francisco.

quarters remained here; here, too, stood the ruinous San Carlos Mission, founded by Father Junipero Serra before the American Revolution. It was the strategic center of the territory, and no officer who meditated the possibility of an American conquest would lose an opportunity to familiarize himself with it. The explorer, accompanied by the American vice-consul at San Francisco, Leidesdorff, rode down the San José Valley, a beautiful pastoral region wooded with oak; and his heart must have leaped as, a little after noon on a clear January day, he caught his first glimpse of the town between two low green hills. On the right lay the blue waters of the bay, with several vessels at anchor; on the left were the scattered buildings, with a wavering outline of pine-clad hills behind; over all was the sunshine of central California, tempered by a snapping breeze.

Monterey consisted of two or three irregular streets, unlighted, paved only with the deep sea sand, which in the rainy season was rent into large fissures, and bordered by houses of sun-baked adobe. Some of these Spanish homes were elegant in their symmetry and spaciousness, and their low-ceiled, wide, comfortable rooms were pleasant refuges from the summer heat. All were substantially erected, and looked as if no gale could shake them.[1] On the bluff above the town stood the fort, with the Mexican flag floating gaily above it; there was a neat and spacious presidio of yellow stone;

[1] Bayard Taylor, *Eldorado*, 133.

and a road from the town led over the hills to the former mission of Carmel, four miles distant. As Tamalpais furnished a landmark for the inhabitants of San Francisco, so a high rocky ridge called Toro Mountain, east of the town, made a landmark for the people of Monterey. The atmosphere of the place, cosily ensconced on its spacious bay, was quiet, mellow, and almost purely Spanish. Its natural surroundings were enchanting. It sat at the extremity of a curving fishhook peninsula, facing across its Bay, with the Pacific Ocean, hidden by the pine hills, booming faintly in the distance at its rear. In front, the waves lapped idly about the few wooden wharves; but anyone who pushed through the deep green woods behind would come out upon a sea which might be very stormy, with the breakers leaping high along its beach. Everywhere in the town the haunting presence of the ocean was felt, its low, distant, thrilling roar hanging over the coast and the inland regions nearby like smoke above a battlefield.[1]

Frémont's first business was to hunt up the American consul, Thomas Larkin, a shrewd, energetic, patriotic Yankee of slender education, whose firm-set jaw impressed the explorer. Larkin, like his compatriots, Abel J. Stearns in Los Angeles and Jacob Leese in Sonoma, had come out to trade, and was well on the way to being the first California millionaire.[2] He was a confidential agent of the State Department, and a

[1] R. L. Stevenson, *The Old and New Pacific Capitals.*
[2] Bryant, *What I Saw in California*, 337.

good one. He told Frémont that Pio Pico, who had been made Governor as a result of the uprising the previous year against Micheltorena, was absent in Los Angeles. He told him much more about the troubled, discontented state of the country, with Pio Pico's own seat none too sure; and he took the Captain to pay a formal call upon the commanding General, Don José Castro, upon ex-Governor Alvarado, and upon the Prefect and Alcalde.

Toward these officials, Frémont assumed a deferential and conciliatory attitude. He was not really a soldier, he assured them, but an engineer, employed by the Topographical Bureau in making a survey of the briefest route from the eastern states to the Pacific. He came in the interests of science and trade, and his men were civilians as peaceable as himself. All they asked was what the scientific workers of one nation might justly request of the courtesy of another. Their camp equipment, clothes, tents, and horse trappings were almost destroyed; they wished merely to replace them and lay in a decent store of provisions. He also suggested that he might like to do a little exploring in the direction of the Colorado River.[1]

To these requests, the Mexicans, polite but plainly suspicious, acceded. For a few days Frémont stayed in Monterey, buying there and in the neighboring country horses, leather goods, food, tents, and some small luxuries for his comrades. He had by this time heard

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 454.

of the whereabouts of his lost party. They had mistaken the place of meeting, which Walker wrongly supposed to be a certain pair of lakes some eighty miles south of the Tulare Lake Fork. For some time he waited there, and then marched northward down the San Joaquin, till he was found by Carson and Dick Owens. The result was that by the middle of February the whole expedition was reunited at a point some thirteen miles south of San José, between San Francisco and Monterey. The men were in good health and spirits, for game had been plentiful, and the animals were fast recuperating.

The spot which Frémont had selected for rest and refitting was the Laguna, a vacant ranch owned by an American named Fisher, only a few miles from the present site of the Lick Observatory. The gentle slopes of the mountains about, the Calaveras and Santa Cruz Ranges, were covered with wild oats, which later in the season rolled in waves of gold, while the soft spring weather had brought a wealth of flowers. Frémont's one objection was that the place was too pleasant and indolent, without "the invigorating salt breezes." Many hard-riding Californians visited the ranch, and his men became friendly with the polite, hospitable, shiftless people. There was a good deal of rough play, and the men hunted and tramped the country while Frémont bought more supplies, botanized, and made scientific observations upon the redwoods, the madrona, and other trees. He was killing time. Finally, near the end of

February, the expedition broke camp and set out—where? Toward Oregon? Toward the Colorado? Toward the southwest, on a line which would take the sixty well-armed men through the best-settled parts of California. Santa Cruz and Monterey lay just ahead, but Frémont passed the latter town on the east, camping March 3, 1846, on the Hartnell ranch, another American holding, some twenty-five miles distant.

Here, as they were resting in the long still afternoon, their camp was thrown into turmoil by the sudden appearance of a Mexican cavalry officer, in tight blue jacket, bright serape, red sash, and buckskin leggings, who, with two men, reined up abruptly before Frémont's tent. He introduced himself as Lieutenant Chavez, and the Captain found him rude and curt in speech. Chavez brought two letters, one from General Castro and one from the Prefect, ordering the party instantly to leave California, under penalty of arrest and forcible expulsion.[1] Frémont, irritated by the Lieutenant's manner and offended by the phrasing of the letters, blazed up angrily. He replied that he was equally astonished by the fact that, after solemnly promising his protection to the expedition, Castro should have withdrawn it, and by Castro's use of such rude and peremptory language. He told Chavez that he defied the officials; that he would refuse to obey an order so insulting to his country and himself, and would leave when he got ready—not before.

[1] *Larkin MSS.*, State Department, March 5, 1846.

In this, Frémont unquestionably did wrong. The Mexican authorities had a perfect right to dismiss him from California, and they possessed good grounds for doing so. Castro had notified the central government of the sudden appearance of this well-armed troop of Americans, and Mexico City, knowing war to be at hand, had taken alarm. It had sent the commandant orders to eject Frémont. Moreover, the Captain's delay in moving after he had once finished refitting, and his unexplained choice of a route which would carry him into the very heart of the California coast settlements, had alarmed Pio Pico. Though he meant only to take an indirect route into the San Joaquin Valley, this seemed a menacing movement.

But Frémont was in no mood to think of the Mexican motives, and hastily prepared himself to give Castro battle. He marched his men to a small wooded flat at the top of a neighboring eminence, Hawk's Peak in the Galiban Mountains, where wood, water, and grass were all available. Here he could fight off a large force of assailants; he commanded a view of the surrounding Santa Clara Valley and Salinas plain; and if a retreat were necessary, he could easily escape to the San Joaquin on the east. While his party was building a rough but strong fort of logs, a tall sapling was cut and stripped, and when all was ready the American flag was raised to its top amid the cheers of the men.

For three days Frémont remained, holding his fort,

his flag flying defiantly the while. He received messages from Larkin, the American consul, which gave him news of the Mexican movements,[1] and some settlers in the region also brought him word of what was going on. He wrote to Larkin that "if we are unjustly attacked we will fight to extremity and refuse quarter, trusting to our country to avenge our death." With his glass, he could see horsemen galloping and a body of 200 troops gathering at the San Juan Bautista Mission. Some *vaqueros* told him that Indians were being enticed into the camp and worked up to the fighting point with drink. The Americans awaited the event without trepidation. As evening approached on the second day, they espied a body of cavalry approaching, and Frémont, descending with forty men to a point where a thicket offered an excellent ambush, prepared to repel them. Happily the courage of the Mexicans failed, and when within a few hundred yards they stopped, consulted with each other, and prudently turned back. Meanwhile, their commander had issued a proclamation:[2]

THE CITIZEN JOSÉ CASTRO LIEUTENANT-COLONEL OF THE MEXICAN ARMY AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA

Fellow Citizens: A band of robbers commanded

[1] *Larkin MSS.* (Bancroft Library) No. 80.
[2] *Fort Sutter Papers* (*MS*), Vol. 3.

by a captain of the United States army, J. C. Frémont, have, without respect to the laws and authorities of the department, daringly introduced themselves into the country and disobeyed the orders both of your commander-in-chief and of the prefect of the district, by which he was required to march forthwith out of the limits of our territory; and without answering our letters he remains encamped at the farm "Natividad," from which he sallies forth committing depredations, and making scandalous skirmishes.

In the name of our native country I invite you to place yourselves under my immediate orders at headquarters, where we will prepare to lance the ulcer which (would it not be done) would destroy our liberties and independence, for which you ought always to sacrifice yourselves, as will your friend and fellow citizen.

Headquarters at "San Juan."
8th March, 1846.

Having thus shown the Mexican officials what he thought of their insulting conduct, having, as he supposed, maintained his own and the American dignity, Frémont decided to retire. Larkin was insistent that hostilities ought to be avoided, while other American residents were nervous regarding the consequences.[1] Moreover, though Frémont had written Larkin that "we have in no wise done wrong to the people or the

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 462, 464.

authorities of the country," he had come to realize that after all his conduct was rash; he might begin a war which Washington did not want, and if President Polk still hoped to obtain California peaceably, his belligerent acts might make such an acquisition impossible. Finally, Castro's force seemed to be growing uncomfortably large; he had three pieces of artillery, and Larkin sent word that an attack was about to begin. At this juncture, the pole bearing the flag fell down, and Frémont, as he wrote later, "took advantage of the accident to say to the men that this was an indication for us to move camp." But, setting off on the evening of March 9, under cover of darkness, toward the San Joaquin at his rear, the Captain moved with defiant slowness. Turning northward toward the Sacramento, for the better part of a week he covered only four or six miles a day. Then he accelerated his pace, and leaving Sutter's Fort again on March 24, passed rapidly up the Sacramento Valley and across the Oregon boundary line.

He left behind him the Mexican officials breathing threats and boasts, the American settlers in the Sacramento Valley buzzing with excitement, and Consul Larkin writing a feverish series of letters to his superiors in Washington to explain the affair. Castro, exultant at getting rid of his enemy without a fight, posted a flaming proclamation, in which he informed the people that a band of famous freebooters—*bandoleros*—had come into the country to sack and to slay, but that with

two hundred courageous patriots he had driven the cowards off.

The whole episode was in one light an act of opera bouffe. It had given an impetuous, hot-blooded Captain of the American Topographical Corps and a rash and fiery Lieutenant-Colonel of the Mexican Army an opportunity to thumb their noses at each other. It had furnished a week of tense excitement for the native Californians and the English and American residents. Nobody had been hurt, and neither side could take any pride in the affair. But in its consequences it was by no means to be taken lightly. Frémont and his men had succeeded in antagonizing many native Californians, who charged them with insolence, horse thievery, and a desire for looting and guerrilla warfare.[1] The restiveness of the Anglo-Saxon settlers had been greatly increased. Some of them had hastily gathered and sent off word to Frémont that they would ride to his rescue at once. Consul Larkin, writing to Secretary Buchanan, was explicit in saying that they were ready at any instant to join just such a standard of revolt as the explorer had raised. He declared that Castro was not eager to try conclusions with Frémont. In fact, with all California behind him, Castro would not have dared to attack Frémont, "even had he been sure of destroying the whole party, as five times their number could have taken their places before the expected battle. Captain Frémont received verbal applications from

[1] *Fort Sutter Papers (MS).*, Vol. 3.

English and Americans to join his party, and could have mustered as many men as the natives." [1]

At Fort Sutter, the American settlers gathered around Frémont with loud expressions of approbation and encouragement. Many of them deplored his departure. The Captain took north with him the knowledge that he could raise an army equal in numbers, and superior in tenacity and strength, to any the Mexicans in California would be likely to bring against him. It was a rather dangerous idea to implant in the mind of an impressionable, headlong, and ambitious young man.

[1] Larkin, *Papers*, State Department, April 2, 1846.

## CHAPTER XVIII

## THE RECALL TO ACTION

It is difficult to determine just how seriously Frémont turned his mind toward exploration again after leaving Sutter's Fort for the North. His letters and *Memoirs* would indicate that his old zest in the blazing of fresh wilderness trails reawakened. To some extent, it undoubtedly did. But in the main his eyes were still fixed upon California; his purpose to remain within easy marching distance of it was unaltered, and it is significant that he made no effort to reach the posts upon the Columbia. His movements before he was so dramatically recalled to the California stage may be briefly dismissed.

The close of March, 1846, found his expedition at the famous ranch of Peter Lassen on Deer Creek, a tributary of the upper Sacramento. Frémont formed a liking for Lassen, a German whose history was only less romantic than Sutter's, and who was a man of practical sense and courage. His wheat was yielding large returns, he was experimenting with cotton, and a vineyard had lately been set out. For almost a month, as if he were intent upon merely killing time, Frémont kept at or near the ranch; he named a high peak of the Coast Range Mount Linn, after his friend the dead

Senator; he made a little excursion up the Pit River Valley, and returning to Lassen's, he lingered there from the 11th to the 24th of April. The day he left was, though he did not know it, an eventful one for the West, for it marked the first clash between Mexican and American troops on the Rio Grande. Pushing northward again, on May 6, he reached Klamath Lake, and could, of course, easily have taken up his old trail to the Columbia River. But this did not suit his plans, and he decided instead to turn to the West and explore the almost untouched Cascade Range.[1] He writes:

> As I have said, except for the few trappers who had searched the streams leading to the ocean, I felt sure that these mountains were absolutely unknown. No one had penetrated their recesses to know what they contained, and no one had climbed to their summits; and there remained the great attraction of mystery in going into unknown places —the unknown lands of which I had dreamed when I began this life of frontier travel. And possibly, I thought, when I should descend their western flanks some safe harbor might yet be found by careful search along the coast, where harbors were so few; and perhaps good passages from the interior through these mountains to the sea. I thought that till the snow should go off the lower part of the mountains I might occupy what remained of the spring by a survey of the Klamath

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 486.

Frémont's Forest Camp Below Mount Shasta
(From Frémont's "Memoirs," Chicago, 1887.)

> River to its heads, and make a good map of the country along the base of the mountains. And if we could not find game enough to live upon, we could employ the Indians to get supplies of salmon and other fish.

The scenery of the North, he adds, had taken hold upon his imagination:

> I had not forgotten how fascinated I had been with the winter beauty of the snowy range farther north, when at sunrise and at sunset their rose-colored peaks stood up out of the dark pine forests into the clear light of the sky. And my thoughts took the same color when I remembered that Mr. Kern, who had his colors with him, could hold these lovely views in all their delicate coloring.

But it may be doubted if Frémont was earnest in his desire to traverse the Cascade Range, and it is certain that he was soon ready to turn back. Snow was falling heavily and continuously in the mountains which rose across his path. The ground was discouragingly difficult. Fallen timber, the débris washed down by rain and melting snow, and the rocky ridges made a march of a few miles exhausting. Their way led between Klamath Lake and the foot of the mountains; and after rising early, plunging and hauling all day through marshy coves and over the spurs of the hills, they would sometimes find at nightfall that they had hardly advanced at all. Their provisions were almost

exhausted; their horses were enfeebled, for the late season offered little forage. Although they saw nothing of the Indians except now and then a canoe glancing rapidly across the gloomy waters, they knew that hostile forces were not far distant. Frémont could see that his men were uneasy and depressed, and he began to feel serious misgivings. At this moment, on the evening of May 8, a voice came out of the dark forest behind him, and he was recalled to the ambitious dream of Californian conquest which had shaped itself months before.

The voice was that of the California rancher Neal, who shouted from the gloom toward the camp, and rode into the firelight with a companion. As the men stiffly dismounted, it was plain that they and their horses were almost spent. They had ridden nearly a hundred miles in the two preceding days. Why? From their first sentences, Frémont gathered that a United States officer was on his trail with dispatches from Washington. When the men had refreshed themselves with coffee at the fire, they told a fuller story. The officer was Lieutenant A. H. Gillespie of the Marine Corps, who had letters for Frémont. He had come up the Sacramento in a small boat, made inquiries at Sutter's Fort, and hurried on. Reaching Neal's ranch on the upper Sacramento, he had been warned that hostile Indians were about, and that it would be dangerous for an inexperienced man to follow Frémont. He had therefore dispatched Neal and one of his employees to overtake the expedition and bring it back. At dawn Frémont's men

were ready to march; and having covered forty-five miles by a herculean effort, at sunset they met Gillespie and his three companions in a glade which formed a natural camping ground.

Here we are confronted by one of the most baffling problems of Frémont's career. What were the instructions brought by Gillespie which caused Frémont to cut short his explorations, turn south, invade California, and begin in earnest the war which he had threatened a few weeks earlier? He knew that mere re-entrance upon California soil, from which he had been expelled with a warning to keep off, would be construed as a hostile act. Did he have genuine warrant for his course? Or did he, with his usual precipitancy, leap to conclusions and base a bold and stubborn policy upon inadequate authority?

Gillespie, a headlong, high-spirited young officer, had left Washington in November, 1845, and reached Monterey on April 17, 1846, on the ship *Cyane* by way of Hawaii.[1] He brought Frémont a copy of an official dispatch from Buchanan at the head of the State Department, a packet of family missives from Senator Benton and Jessie, and some verbal explanations, as well as much news picked up en route. The family letters, of course, had no official weight. Frémont knew that the Senator's long experience, his position as chairman of the Senate Military Committee, and his great political prestige, made him powerful with the Adminis-

[1] *Larkin MSS.*, State Department.

tration. He knew that Benton would stand by him loyally in anything he did. But, as an army officer, Frémont also knew that nothing the Senator wrote could be used as warrant for any military step, and that to launch his force of sixty upon a warlike course he required some direct official authority, unless he were ready to take the risk of disavowal and punishment. The only really official document brought by Gillespie was Buchanan's dispatch. What policy did it warrant Frémont in pursuing?

The answer appears simple. The dispatch was directed, not to Frémont, but to the consul, Larkin, though Gillespie had been ordered to take it on to Frémont. It contained nothing whatever that the explorer could construe as a suggestion that he employ armed force against the Californians. It instructed Larkin to carry on a peaceable intrigue for the secession of California from Mexico by the voluntary act of its inhabitants. He was requested to be discreet, cautious, and sleepless. He was to approach the California authorities, assure them of American good will in their disputes with Mexico, and encourage them to break loose with a promise of our "kind offices as a sister republic." Once they became a separate nation, such as Texas had been, they might look forward to annexation. "If the people should desire to unite their destiny with ours," wrote Buchanan, "they would be received as brethren." [1]

[1] Text in *Century Magazine*, April, 1891.

One other injunction was laid upon Larkin with special emphasis. He was told that Washington had reason to fear British or French aggression in California; Larkin himself, in fact, had warned the Government of this. He must counteract foreign machinations by friendly appeals: "On all proper occasions you should not fail prudently to warn the government and people of California of the danger of such an interference to their peace and happiness; to inspire them with a jealousy of European dominion; and to arouse in their bosoms that love of liberty and independence so natural to the American continent." Larkin, that is, was to do his best to detach California from Mexico for the United States, but he was to do so with the aid and good will of the Californians. Obviously, Frémont had here no authority for hostile action.

The desire of the Polk Administration to conciliate the native Californians might be attested by many other facts and documents. A dispatch from Secretary Bancroft was sent to Commodore Sloat, commanding the Pacific squadron at Mazatlan, under the precise date of Buchanan's dispatch to Larkin, October 14, 1845. Sloat was ordered to keep in constant touch with Larkin, and also to ascertain the attitude of the California people toward the United States and Mexico City. "You will do everything," he was directed, "that is proper to conciliate towards our country the most friendly regard of the people of California." If hostilities with Mexico did not occur, he was to detach part

of his squadron to display the American flag in the Columbia River, while he might also, in the event of continued peace, send Commodore Stockton home around Cape Horn with three vessels. This dispatch, like that to Larkin, breathed a spirit of friendliness and calm.

So much for the official documents; but there remain the private letters and Gillespie's verbal information, upon which Frémont, as he stated later, unquestionably based his actions. Gillespie brought a budget of exciting news. He told Frémont that Sloat had heard of his encounter with Castro through the brig *Hannah*, and had promptly sent the sloop *Portsmouth* to San Francisco to protect the Americans, where it still lay. He told him that Mexico and the United States had now drifted to the very brink, if not beyond the brink, of war; and that Taylor had advanced to the Rio Grande, where fighting was expected at any time. He brought news that the Mexican authorities at Mazatlan, at last accounts, had expected Sloat to blockade the port at once, and had fled to Rosario with the archives. Finally, Gillespie showed Frémont a letter which Larkin had sent him, under date of April 23, to San Francisco, just as he was starting north to find the explorer. "Capt. Montgomery [of the sloop *Portsmouth*] is of the opinion," wrote the consul,[1] "that Commodore Sloat may by the next mail (6 or 8 days) have a declaration on the part of the United States against Mexico, in

[1] *Larkin MSS.*, State Department; letters of April 17, April 23, 1846.

which case we shall see him in a few days to take the country." He added that the Californians were much disturbed by the *Portsmouth's* arrival. "I have (as my opinion) said to Generals Castro, Carrillo, and Vallejo, that our flag may fly here in thirty days. The first says, for his own plans, war is preferable to peace."

As a matter of fact, on the very days that Gillespie and Neal reached Frémont, May 8 and 9, 1846, the first sharp battles of the Mexican War occurred.[1] Frémont felt almost certain that fighting was already under way. In the light of Gillespie's news of the imminence of war, the injunctions regarding peace and conciliation in the dispatch to Larkin seemed unreal and out of date. The explorer says as much in his *Memoirs*. "This idea was no longer practicable as actual war was inevitable and immediate," he writes; "moreover, it was in conflict with our own instructions. We dropped this idea from our minds, but falling on others less informed, it came near losing us California." He later adds that "the rapid progress of affairs had already rendered" conciliation impossible, and made it necessary to "carry out the ultimate purpose of the government."

But Gillespie also bore family letters, and verbal instructions from Secretary Bancroft. Upon the nature of the family letters, we have explicit statements from both Frémont and Jessie, and both agree that they warned Frémont to be ready to take a militant stand. Mrs. Frémont asserts that they might be said to be in a family cipher, for they were full of prearranged refer-

[1] H. H. Bancroft, *History of California*, V, 202.

ences to talks and agreements known only at home.[1] Frémont states this more emphatically. Benton's letter, he says, "while apparently of friendship and family detail, contained passages and suggestions which, read by the light of many conversations and discussions with himself and others at Washington, clearly indicated to me that I was required by the government to find out any foreign schemes in relation to California, and so far as it might be in my power, to counteract them."[2] In a conversation long afterward with Josiah Royce, Frémont said that the letters were particularly clear upon the desirability "of taking and holding possession of California in the event of any occurrence that would justify it, leaving it to my discretion to decide upon such an occurrence."[3] He was warned of the British designs and told that Polk desired that he "should not let the English get possession of California, but should use any means in his power, or any occasion that offered, to prevent such a thing."

No doubt Frémont's recollection of the affair might be regarded as confused or colored; but it is in great measure corroborated by a letter, inaccurate in a few particulars but illuminating, which Secretary Bancroft wrote him in old age, when Royce's book had made the subject controversial.[4] Bancroft speaks of verbal instructions:

[1] Jessie Benton Frémont, *Century Magazine*, Vol. 19, New Series, 922.
[2] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 489.
[3] Royce, *California*, 116.
[4] *Frémont MSS.*; dated Newport, R. I., Sept. 3, 1886.

You as an officer of the army were made thoroughly acquainted with the state of things in California.

My motive in sending so promptly the order to take possession was not from any fear that England would resist, but from the apprehension that an English man of war in San Francisco harbor would have a certain degree of inconvenience, and that it was much better for us to be masters there before the ship should arrive; and my orders reached there very long before any English vessel was off California. The shameful delay of Sloat made a danger, but still he took possession of San Francisco before a British ship arrived.

Not having my papers here, all I can say is, that after your interview with Gillespie, you were absolved from any orders as an explorer, and became an officer of the American army, warned by your government of your new danger against which you became bound to defend yourself; and it was made known to you, on the authority of the Secretary of the Navy, that a great object of the President was to obtain possession of California. If I had been in your place, I should have considered myself bound to do what I could to promote the purpose of the President. You were alone, no Secretary of War to appeal to, he was thousands of miles off; and yet it was officially made known to you that

your country was at war;[1] and it was so made known expressly to guide your conduct. It was further made known to you, that the acquisition of California was become a chief object of the President. If you had letters to that effect from the Secretary of War, you had your warrant. If you were left without orders from the War Department, certainly you learned through the Secretary of the Navy that the President's plan of war included the taking possession of California.

The truth is, that no officer of the government had anything to do with California but the Secretary of the Navy, so long as I was in the Cabinet. It had been my desire to acquire California by all honorable means much before that time.

As to the President, if you see fit to state what I have stated to you, that President Polk entered on his office with a fixed determination to acquire California, if he could acquire it in an honorable and just manner; if you see fit to make that statement, and anyone disputes it, I give you full leave to cite me as your authority. I held and the President held, that it was impossible for Mexico, situated as things then were, to have retained possession of California; and therefore it was right to negotiate with Mexico for the acquisition of California by ourselves as the decisive point in the perfect establishment of the Union on a foundation that

[1] This was of course not true.

cannot be moved. Up to that time the division was between North and South. From that moment all division, if there was to be one, was between the North, Centre, and West against the South.

Bancroft's memorandum, enclosed with this letter, declares:

> Very soon after March 4, 1845, Mr. Polk, one day when I was alone with him, in the clearest manner and with the utmost energy declared to me what were to be the four great measures of his administration. He succeeded in all the four, and one of the four was the acquisition of California for the United States. This it was hoped to accomplish by peaceful negotiation; but if Mexico, in resenting our acceptance of the offer of Texas to join us, should begin a war with us, then by taking possession of the province. As we had a squadron in the North Pacific, but no army, the measures for carrying out this design fell to the Navy Department. The Secretary of the Navy, who had good means of gaining news as to the intentions of Mexico, and had reason to believe that its government intended to make war on us, directed timely preparation for it. In less than four months after the inauguration, on the 24th day of June, 1845, he sent orders to the commanding officer of the United States naval forces on the Pacific that "if he should ascertain that Mexico had declared

war against the United States, he should at once possess himself of the port of San Francisco and such other ports as his forces might permit." At the same time he was instructed to encourage the inhabitants of California "to adopt a course of neutrality." The Secretary of the Navy repeated these orders in August and in October, 1845, and in February, 1846. On one of these occasions he sent the orders by the hands of an accomplished and thoroughly trustworthy officer of the navy as a messenger, well instructed in the designs of the Department and with the purposes of the administration, so far as they related to California. Captain Frémont having been sent originally on a peaceful mission to the west by way of the Rocky Mountains, it had become necessary to give him warning of the new state of affairs and the designs of the President. The officer who had charge of the dispatches from the Secretary of the Navy to Commodore Sloat, and who had purposely been made acquainted with their import, accordingly made his way to Captain Frémont, who thus became acquainted with the state of affairs and the purposes of the government. Being absolved from any duty as an explorer, Captain Frémont was left to his duty as an officer in the service of the United States, with the further authoritative knowledge that the government intended to take possession of California.

Bancroft adds, in this memorandum, that while the United States had no reason to fear a conflict in California with any European nation, some Power might take a position which would be "inconvenient," and that the Administration wished "due celerity" in the movements of its forces.

Of strict legal authority for re-entering Mexican territory and fomenting an insurrection by the American settlers along the Sacramento, Frémont had none; of moral authority, he had a great deal. He knew that the written message to Larkin, like that to Sloat, had to be guarded and harmless in tenor, for it might easily fall into Mexican hands. He would, therefore, give the greater weight to verbal communications. The very fact that Gillespie had been ordered without fail to find and talk with Frémont was full of significance. With the knowledge that immediate war was almost a certainty, which was he to do: push on north and homeward by way of the Oregon Trail, leaving the scene of action behind him, or return at once to California? No man of courage and patriotism could hesitate. It was impossible to stand still; it would have been a spiritless and craven act to turn his back on California; the only course was to retrace his steps. The whole tradition of the American Army was for bold and resolute action in the face of a possible enemy. It prized initiative, even if it went as far as Nelson's initiative when he turned his blind eye to the signals of his commander. Frémont did not know what he would do when he

reached California. He would wait for events to shape his acts. It is plain from a subsequent letter home that he believed it possible the storm might still blow over, and leave him free to take the southern route to the states. But if the storm broke, or a British move was made, he meant it to find him near Sutter's Fort.

We can easily imagine the scene, the circumstances, and the thoughts that passed through Frémont's mind that May night in the forest opening of southern Oregon, beside the rippling creek. The young officer paced back and forth by the fire, interrogating Gillespie. In his excitement, he failed, for the second time in his life in hostile Indian country, to post any sentries. Long after his party had wrapped themselves in their blankets, he remained by the fire, going over the home letters. Everything in them, he wrote years afterward, seemed to say: "*The time has come. England must not get a foothold. We must be first. Act; discreetly but positively.*" If the war that seemed inevitable should come, a grand opportunity lay before him to realize in their fullest extent all the dreams of Senator Benton, all the plans the western junto in Congress had based upon the doctrine of manifest destiny. The Pacific Ocean would be made the western boundary of the United States, and to Frémont would belong the principal credit for the feat. But he must be ready to act before the Mexicans could organize a defense or the British gain a foothold. Full of these thoughts, the Captain crept to his bed under some low cedars growing

along the margin of the woods, their boughs almost touching the ground, and slowly drowsed off.[1]

The story of the remainder of that eventful and tragic night, the one night Frémont permitted a surprise, has long ago passed into the popular annals of California and has been retold a hundred times. How, toward dawn, Kit Carson was awakened by the noise an Indian made in driving his axe through the head of one of the sleeping men, Basil Lajeunesse; how he called out in alarm, and was answered by the groan of the half-breed Denny, who had been filled with arrows as he lay; how the camp instantly roused itself, and sprang to cover, rifles in hand. The fires, smoldering in the center of the glade, gave out a murky glare against the cedars bounding the camp. As the Klamaths leaped into the open ground to attack the Delawares, Frémont, Carson, Godey, and two other white men rushed to the rescue, shouting and firing point-blank. The Klamath chief fell and the others, disconcerted, leaped back into the woods. Then ensued a desultory warfare in the dark, the white men repaying with lead every volley of arrows.

When, at dawn, the Indians slunk away, the light revealed a tragic scene. Three men, Basil, the Delaware Crane, and the half-breed, lay dead in their blood, while another Delaware was wounded. On the ground also lay the Klamath chief, and Carson vengefully seized an English half axe which hung at the Indian's waist, and knocked his head to pieces. His quiver contained

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 489, 490.

forty of the finest and most deadly arrows the party had ever seen, tipped with a steel head of lancet sharpness, obtained probably from the Hudson's Bay Company traders, and poisoned for six inches. This disaster sealed Frémont's determination, for his expedition was too much shaken and discouraged to resume its northward march into the wild Cascade Range.

Sobered by its loss, the party turned southward; but before it left the country, it paused to wreak vengeance upon the treacherous Klamaths. Frémont set upon the largest Indian village within reach, killed fourteen or fifteen of the braves, and destroyed the rush huts and the scaffolds upon which they were drying their annual supply of fish.[1] It was not a difficult task for a body of frontiersmen armed with the best rifles of the day and facing only clubs and arrows. But it gave Frémont deep satisfaction. "I had kept the promise I had made to myself, and had punished these people well for their treachery," he wrote, "and now I turned my thoughts to the work they had delayed." On May 24, the expedition arrived again at Lassen's ranch upon the upper waters of the Sacramento.

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 493, 494.

## CHAPTER XIX

## THE BEAR FLAG WAR

As to the precise mood and aims of Frémont, as his expedition moved south to Lassen's ranch and beyond, there is room for doubt. But two facts are fairly evident: First, that he was almost certain that the next few weeks would bring decisive news of war; and second, that he was resolved to play a spirited rôle as soon as war began. Until that time, he meant to find new excuses for lingering at or near Sutter's Fort, the center of American settlement. As he rode along, he talked over his plans with Gillespie, who was as full as himself of vivid ambitions for American conquest—for forestalling the British—in the next few months.[1]

At Lassen's ranch, Frémont paused to write Senator Benton a letter which—because there was great danger of its falling into the hands of the Mexican authorities—studiously avoided any reference to the situation in California, and in its mention of his future plans was deliberately misleading. Most of it was devoted to Oregon affairs. The Captain called attention to the fact that the British had a fur post on the Umpqua River, directly west of Klamath Lake, in the heart of the Klamath tribe. They had planted it there, Frémont

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 495.

thought, as an outpost in the event of war with the United States, where Indian auxiliaries might be recruited and kept supplied with arms and ammunition. These Indians were brave men, expert shots, and warmly attached to the British. "If there is to be a war with England," urged Frémont, "it is of great importance that they [the English] should instantly be driven from this and similar posts. . . . These things may be worthy of Mr. Buchanan's attention." For the rest, the explorer expressed disappointment that he had not heard directly from Buchanan, and announced that he would proceed homeward by way of the Colorado, but could hardly reach the frontier until late in September. Of the facts regarding California, and of his real intentions, he dared not say a word.

What his immediate intentions were became evident the moment Frémont arrived among the American settlers below Lassen's ranch on the Sacramento. He halted to observe the situation of affairs, collect news, and re-arm his party. On May 25, he sent posthaste down to Captain J. B. Montgomery of the warship *Portsmouth* in San Francisco Bay for 8,000 rounds of ammunition, i.e., powder, 300 pounds of rifle lead, and 8,000 percussion caps, as well as food, medicines, soap, and tobacco. His command, he wrote,[1] was "at present almost destitute"; but he was thinking of more than provisions. He regarded his party as no longer an exploring expedition, but a military force. "I clearly saw

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 508.

that my proper course was to observe quietly the progress of affairs, and take advantage of any contingency which I could turn in favor of the United States, and, where uncertainties arose, to give my own country the benefit of my doubts by taking decided action." [1]

His sudden reappearance within forbidden bounds created a commotion among the American residents, and inevitably the malcontents and adventurers who longed for a conflict with Mexico responded most warmly to the excitement. Many came riding into Frémont's camp. During 1845, a large number of new emigrants had arrived, so that there were now fully 800 Americans, nearly all of them able-bodied men, in the province.[2] Some were legal landowners who had gone through the necessary process of becoming citizens; the great majority, however, were simply squatters, or men who picked up a living by combining work as ranch hands with hunting and trapping. To understand Frémont's relations with them, it should be understood that they conformed to the rough frontier type. While a number showed sterling character and high ability, the gamut among the reckless sailors, ignorant, rugged frontier farmers, and buckskin-clad trappers ran to a low level. With the Anglo-Saxon's instinctive feeling of superiority, most of them looked down upon the gay, indolent, inefficient Californians, who loved gambling, guitars, and fandangos, and who made so little use of the rich country. They felt that California ought to be

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 508.
[2] Smith, *The War with Mexico*, I, 318.

in the hands of their own virile, energetic race, and that it was only a question of time and opportunity till they should take it over.

These men brought Frémont a wild variety of rumors —that war between the United States and Mexico had begun; that it was about to begin; that Castro and his merciless greaser crew were planning to fall upon all foreign settlers and scatter them to the winds; that Castro and others were plotting to separate California from Mexico, but were unwilling to place it under American protection; that the British were scheming to annex California forthwith. Samuel Hensley, one of the leading American settlers, and Neal, with whom Frémont had talked at length, agreed that the American residents would either have to leave the country soon, or fight for the homes they had made.[1] Frémont lent an especially attentive ear to stories of aggression against the Americans and of plans of the California authorities to injure and restrict them. His own clash with the Government a few weeks earlier had prepared him to believe anything of Mexican treachery and bullying.

Indeed, private Mexican outrages and official threats had been numerous, and had been resented by quiet and substantial American residents, not merely by the immigrant riffraff. The previous October Captain Elliot Libbey, of the bark *Tasso,* had been set upon in the main street of San Francisco, stabbed, beaten, and left senseless; when complaint had been made to the authorities,

[1] In corroboration, see *Wm. Hargrave MS.*, p. 2–4.

nothing whatever had been done. American residents about San Francisco Bay, with ship captains, merchants, and both the American and British vice-consuls, had petitioned the commander of the United States ship *Levant* for the presence of a man of war in the Bay; they believed the subprefect of the district hostile to them, and declared that "the situation of all foreign residents at this place is extremely insecure and precarious." Farther inland, the settlers lived in fear that hostile Californians would inflame the Indians against them. The previous year an attack by the Mexican authorities upon Sutter's Fort had been so imminent, in the opinion of various Americans, that the clerk Bidwell who welcomed Frémont to that place had ridden night and day to warn Sutter. Bidwell tells us that the "Californians were always talking of expelling Americans." [1]

Most ominous of all, on April 30, 1846, while Frémont was still proceeding northward into Oregon, Castro had issued a proclamation warning the Americans again that they had no right whatever to hold land unless they became Mexican citizens.[2] In this paper he instructed all the judges that they could not legally permit any sale or other transfer of realty to foreigners; while he gave brusque notice to Yankee squatters that not only would they forfeit any purchase they had made, but they would "be subject, unless they retire volun-

[1] John Bidwell, *Statement* (*MS.*), Harvard Library.
[2] For the effect of this proclamation, see *Wm. F. Swazey MS.*, p. 8.

tarily from the country, to be expelled from it whenever the government may find it convenient." Castro, an ambitious, bombastic man, who liked to strut a bit, even made warlike preparations, and talked of bringing armed forces against the settlers.[1] Reports of this, perhaps exaggerated, quickly reached the Sacramento.

There was really a vast deal of covert ill feeling and distrust between the majority of the American settlers and the general body of Californians. Josiah Royce, in his volume on California, writes as if Frémont's precipitation of the so-called Bear Flag War were the origin of the sullen hostility between the two peoples which followed the annexation of the province. Actually, the tension between the races was already painful. Not merely did the Americans tend to regard the natives as lazy, childlike, untruthful, and cowardly. The Californians, for their part, tended to look upon the immigrants as rough, overbearing, and grasping—as brutal fellows whose one aim was gain. In general, mutual understanding was impossible. Protestant against Catholic, Anglo-Saxon against Latin, strenuous pioneers against idlers—they were sundered by instinctive antipathies.[2] The part which Americans had played in various California revolts had excited animosity and fear. Moreover, the Californians had sufficient racial pride to resent the American annexation of Texas, and had doubtless learned from Mexican writers that the

[1] Larkin, *Correspondence*, State Department, April 17, 1846.
[2] Cf. Smith, *War with Mexico*, I, 327.

Spanish-speaking people there had fared ill. A few liberal and informed Californians favored American control, but the predominant view was antagonistic.

Frémont was impressed by the reports of Castro's threatening attitude and of the danger of Indian attacks. It seemed altogether likely to him that the Mexican officials would try to incite the savages to an uprising. Some settlers who came into his camp declared that the half-civilized Indians working on the ranches were leaving their tasks and taking to the mountains, an indication of imminent hostilities. Sutter sent Frémont a courier with a message which the Captain interpreted as meaning that an Indian onslaught was in preparation.[1] Inasmuch as California had never had a military force able to cope with the tribes, outlying farms had frequently been sacked, and it was only recently that Sutter himself had felt safe. The province between Lassen's ranch and the Mexican line contained perhaps 20,000 aborigines, of whom half had a smattering of civilization; but current reports exaggerated their numbers to 40,000 or more.[2] They were lazy, unthrifty, and thievish; physically, they were greatly inferior to the best tribes of the plains, as, for instance, the Sioux; but when aroused and collected in numbers, they were a real menace. Frémont shared the frontiersman's usual prejudice against savages, whom he regarded as uniformly treacherous, base, and cruel. Once he had seen

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 502.

[2] Revere, *A Tour of Duty in California*, Ch. 12; Walter Colton, *Three Years in California*, 19 ff.

a party of emigrants after a band of Indians had wreaked its worst upon them—the men mutilated and flayed alive, the women impaled upon sharp stakes—and he had never forgotten it. He still felt a keen resentment over the death of his faithful Basil Lajeunesse. Telling the settlers that he would take precautions to protect them and their families, he kept a close surveillance over such Indians as he could, and made ready for active operations.

Moving on May 29 to the Bear River, Frémont made camp the following day near the Buttes of Sacramento, not far north of Sutter's Fort. This was an isolated mountain ridge, a half-dozen miles in length, which ran up at the summit nearly 2,700 feet above the sea. Frémont chose a point with strong natural defenses, and good water at the southeastern base, the only objection to which was the extreme heat, for the eminence cut off the northwest breeze. Settlers came into this new camp in greater numbers than ever, and with more alarming news. One rumor was that Castro was advancing against Frémont with two or three hundred armed men; another, that Castro was planning to build a fort near the Bear River Pass to drive back the heavy concourse of new American immigrants expected that summer.[1] In fact, Castro had been instructed the previous December by the Mexican government [2] to "redouble his precautions to avoid the introduction of these

[1] *Monterey Californian*, Aug. 29, 1846.
[2] Edward Channing, *History of the United States*, V. Ch. 17.

strangers." But most disturbing of all were the reports that an Indian attack was almost certain.

The wheat throughout the valley was now dry, and Castro was said to be inciting the savages to set fire to it. This step would have been quite consonant with Mexican methods. Hensley and Neal, still with Frémont, believed the story. Sutter, farther down the river, believed it. He writes in his diary that he had rallied "most all of the men in my employ, for a campaign with the Mukelumney, which has been engaged by Castro and his Officers to revolutionize all the Indians against me, to kill all the foreigners, burn their houses, and Wheatfields." [1] Frémont decided that "the time for me too had come." [2] He resolved to forestall the Indians and strike a blow which would thoroughly intimidate them. Thus he would insure the safety of the settlers, and at the same time protect his communications to the rear, making sure that if he moved south to Monterey there would be no formidable Indian force behind him to cut off supplies and recruits from the American ranches.

Sallying out at the first glimmer of day, Frémont and about fifty men rode rapidly down the west bank of the Sacramento. The dry season had turned the countryside brown; the wild oats were shaking sere in the wind, and the trees drooped dustily over the half-empty creeks. Along the river, where fish and acorns were plentiful, lay the largest Indian villages. No warning

[1] Sutter, *MS. Diary*, June 3, 1846.
[2] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 516.

was given, and the savages were taken utterly by surprise. Riding into the first *ranchería* as the sun dispersed the river mist, Frémont's men raised a wild chorus of yells and opened fire, killing several Indians, and driving the rest, including several wounded, helter-skelter into the woods and the water. Then without delay the white men hurried along the river to the other villages, only to find that the news was traveling even faster than themselves. The moment they came in sight of the rude wooden shelters, the smoking camp fires, the assemblage of barking dogs and half-wild, flea-bitten ponies, they could see the Indians scurrying for shelter. Before sunset nearly all the villages had thus been emptied. As they reached the last and rode down a hill toward the stream, they could see the Indians in wild commotion, and when they entered the *ranchería* the water was dotted with painted heads hastily making for the other shore. It was a "rude but necessary measure," says Frémont of the foray. No doubt he sincerely thought so, but in spite of the fact that his scouts reported many of the Indians in war paint and conducting war ceremonies, the necessity is dubious.[1]

Meanwhile, the more impetuous among the American settlers had made up their minds to take quick defensive measures against Castro and his Californians. They did not have the direct incitement of Frémont; they did have his indirect encouragement. This is the conclusion that must be drawn from a confusing and largely con-

[1] Cf. Dellenbaugh, *Frémont and '49*, 330.

tradictory mass of evidence on the subject. We know from such narratives as B. F. Bonney's how intense the resentment against the authorities had grown.[1] There is some evidence that Frémont went so far as to suggest to William B. Ide, one of the leading settlers, that Castro should be provoked to attack the Americans,[2] in order to justify the interference of United States troops and bring about the conquest of California. This does not seem satisfactory or credible evidence. But he did go pretty far in making use of the restiveness and apprehension of the Americans. We have the statement of other emigrant leaders that he wished them to act, although declining as yet to resort to arms himself:[3]

> Information was received by Mr. William B. Ide, living on the Sacramento, on the eighth of June, by letter brought up by Indian runner, that 200 mounted Mexicans were on their march up the Sacramento River, with the design of destroying the crops, burning the houses, and driving off the cattle belonging to the foreigners. [This was a baseless rumor.] Mr. Ide immediately visited the settlements on the Sacramento, and finding most of the men of the valley with Capt. Frémont, repaired to his camp. He then conversed with Capt. Frémont on the subject of the revolution, who advised immediate organization and resistance on

[1] B. F. Bonney, *Across the Plains by Prairie Schooner*, 12 ff.
[2] Theodore H. Hittell, *History of California*, II, 419 ff.
[3] See their narrative, *Niles's Register*, Vol. 73, 110 ff.

the part of the foreigners, but declined any action on his part, or that of the men under his command.

Many of the settlers had reached the conclusion that, no matter what Frémont did, the time had come for them to act. William Hargrave, who had settled in the Napa Valley two years earlier, tells us that his American neighbors there considered the outlook "very gloomy"; that they feared the Mexicans would try to eject them; and that "we foreigners were ready to fight for our new homes."[1] We have a similar account by William F. Swasey, who was for a time Sutter's bookkeeper at the Fort. The settlers had heard, he states, that a large number of the native Californians had met at Monterey to discuss a plan for declaring the territory free and placing it under the protection of a foreign flag, and that a majority were in favor of a British protectorate. The arrival of the British warship *Collingwood* made English annexation seem, to some observers at least, a distinct danger.[2] A spontaneous American revolt was on the point of breaking out when Frémont so fortuitously returned. According to Hargrave, he was one of a party of nine or ten men who came to Frémont's camp to seek assistance. "Kelsey acted as spokesman," he says, "and I do not recollect the language used, but my impression was at the time that Frémont, though very cautious and evidently averse to precipitate action, was willing enough to re-

[1] *Hargrave MS.*, pp. 3, 4 (Bancroft Library).
[2] *Swasey MS.*, pp. 8, 9 (Bancroft Library).

sume active operations, but he preferred to see for himself in how far the settlers of Napa and Sonoma Valley were ready to shake off the Mexican yoke. At any rate, he peremptorily refused to take any responsibility for sudden action on our part and endeavored to delay or frustrate our efforts. Whether Frémont expressed himself differently when he spoke to Kelsey alone, later in the day, I cannot say."

Frémont was playing a waiting game. He knew that the settlers were determined to act, he gave them at least partial encouragement, and he bided his time. The great object was to gain California for the United States, and this seemed to him the shrewdest course. "We made no secret of our intentions," Hargrave says of the settlers, "to keep up the agitation till the opportunity arrived for a bold stroke. On our return to the Napa Valley we found that the revolutionary movement had gained more ground, and steps were taken at once to organize a force sufficient for our first enterprise—the capture of Sonoma." [1] He adds that a majority of the men on the north side of San Francisco Bay did not feel friendly toward Frémont at the beginning of the Bear Flag War, but became cordial later. The recollections of John Fowler of Napa County strongly corroborate Hargrave's account.[2] He declares that the fear of the Mexicans was such that many settlers had been preparing to leave California for the States or for Oregon.

[1] *Hargrave MS.*
[2] John Fowler, *MS. Narrative,* Bancroft Library.

Others wished to fight, and "I was in favor of acting at once, independent of Col. Frémont and without consulting him." Swasey says simply that "the Americans and foreigners generally were called together in Sacramento, Napa, and Sonoma Valleys for the purpose of resistance." It would seem that Swasey, who was very close to Larkin at this time, thought he knew what were the confidential instructions of the Federal Government which Gillespie had brought to Frémont. "Their substance was," he states, "that the Colonel should be governed by circumstances, and, if a movement appeared among the Americans to bring about an annexation to the United States, or to defeat the designs of another government (the object of the *Collingwood* being well understood), he should identify himself therewith, keeping near to California to be prepared for such emergency." [1] This testimony is worth little as regards the supposed instructions; it is worth a good deal as to what was in Frémont's mind.

He did not need to rouse the settlers to fall upon the defenseless Californians whom Royce pities so much; the Americans had already been aroused by a fear, for which they had only too good grounds, of hostile action by the California authorities. He was glad to see their armed rising. It meant the swift end of Mexican authority, for he had no doubt that the settlers could defeat Castro. It meant the forestalling of any action which the British might contemplate. The settlers'

[1] *Swasey MS.*, p. 26.

action would be decisive as regarded the future American sovereignty in California, and yet the American Government would not be involved. If they were hard pressed, he might join them, leaving Washington free to disavow his step if it wished. If he heard of the commencement of war with Mexico, he would certainly join them. There can be little doubt that Frémont, speaking confidentially, promised the settlers that if worse came to worst he would come to their aid—though as a blind he still spoke of leaving shortly for the States.[1] While he maintained great reticence as to the instructions he had received through Gillespie, everyone supposed that whatever he did was with the authority of the United States.[2]

Frémont's waiting game was, if you will, the game of an opportunist; but it was precisely his duty to be an opportunist. Royce later criticized him for being bloody-minded and precipitate; the American settlers at the time criticized him for being hesitant and careful. "We left him," says Hargrave, "most of us somewhat disgusted with the result of our interview." His course exposed him to misunderstanding, but any course he could possibly have taken would have done that. Under these circumstances, the first blow was struck.

It happened that Castro had sent a Lieutenant Arce to the north shore of San Francisco Bay to collect some scattered horses bearing the government brand. The

[1] Royce, *California*, 59; Cf. *Congressional Globe*, Aug. 9, 1856.
[2] Bidwell, *Century Magazine*, Vol. 19, New Series, 519.

officer collected about one hundred and fifty animals, and was taking them southward by way of Sutter's Fort and the San Joaquin Valley. Necessarily, the whole countryside knew of the movement: Arce, in the bright Mexican uniform of blue, red, and silver effects, supervising a dozen men, with their flashy serapes, high Mexican saddles, and lassoes, as they herded the mounts at a trot toward the fords of the Sacramento, the cavalcade raising a thick cloud of dust under the June sky. They reached Sutter's Fort stayed overnight as Sutter's guests, and went on south the next day to the Cosumne River, sixteen or eighteen miles distant, where they camped for the night. Here they were surprised by a party of a dozen settlers,[1] under Ezekiel Merritt, who disarmed them, took away their horses, and insultingly told them to carry the news to Castro. Merritt was a tall, rawboned frontiersman, fearless, simple, and fond of risks, who was a natural chieftain for the rougher immigrants. He regarded Frémont with enormous respect, and later Frémont called him his field lieutenant.

These two strokes, the raid against the Indians and the capture of Arce's horses, raised in northern California the signal of war. No one in this remote Mexican province yet knew that almost a month earlier (May 12, 1846) Congress had declared war; that in the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, Taylor had driven the Mexicans across the Rio Grande. The acts of Frémont and Merritt produced a feeling of con-

[1] W. B. Ide, letter to Commodore Stockton; one story says twenty-five settlers.

sternation among the peace-loving Americans and friendly Californians. When Sutter heard that Arce had been attacked by a group of settlers, he expressed astonishment and indignation.[1] Other Americans were immensely pleased. At last, they felt, California was to be brought quickly and decisively under the American flag. Many of high character welcomed the new turn of affairs. Long afterward an observer asked an estimable pioneer who had four sons under Frémont if he felt any compunction in attacking the Californians.[2] "He said he had Scripture example for it. The Israelites took the promised land of the East by arms, and the Americans must take the promised land of the West in the same way."

Frémont now saw that he had aroused forces that could not easily be suppressed; that he had set in motion men of headlong temper, and made it certain that the Mexican authorities would strike back. The result was his decision, still keeping in the background, to instigate an attack upon the small military post of Sonoma, fifteen miles north of San Francisco Bay.[3] Here were cannon, small arms, munitions, and horses, which Frémont needed; here lived General Vallejo, once commandant general of the province—a firm friend of American annexation—who might be used to influence the public. A quick stroke, with the raising of the American flag, would once for all end the danger

[1] Sutter, *Diary;* Bidwell, *Century Magazine,* Vol. 19, New Series, 519 ff.
[2] Cf. Colton, *Three Years in California,* Ch. 10.
[3] Thomas S. Martin, *MS. Narrative,* pp. 23, 24.

that England, in collusion with Mexico, would occupy California. Frémont states that he sent Merritt, his field lieutenant, into the town "instructed to surprise" it.[1] It is clear that he had planned all the steps beforehand, and anticipated little or no resistance.

The feat was quickly accomplished. Sonoma was an old mission establishment, now a dull and ruinous-looking place, infested by countless fleas. The chief buildings—the quartel, the residences of Vallejo, his brother, and his brother-in-law, Jacob Leese, and a few others—looked upon a large plaza, disfigured after the careless California fashion by the skulls and skeletons of slaughtered beeves.[2] At dead of night, some thirty-three or thirty-four armed settlers rode into the unsuspecting hamlet, or as they grandiloquently called it, fortress, routed the astonished Californians out of bed, and took possession of the military equipment. These included eight fieldpieces, two hundred stands of arms, and almost a hundredweight of powder. Vallejo, protesting, was taken with the rest to Sutter's Fort, where Merritt and Frémont had planned to jail them.

They had not consulted the owner; and here within the heavy adobe walls on this morning of June 14, 1846, occurred a dramatic clash between Frémont and Sutter. No one overheard it. But it is certain that Sutter reproached Frémont for his harsh and arbitrary course, and that Frémont told him he had better support the

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 523.
[2] Bryant, *What I Saw in California*, 333 ff.

uprising or keep his mouth shut. When the interview ended, Sutter came to Bidwell "greatly agitated, with tears in his eyes, and said that Frémont had told him he was a Mexican, and that if he did not like what he [Frémont] was doing, he would set him across the San Joaquin River, and he could go and join the Mexicans." [1] In other words, Frémont threatened to eject him from the Fort and take possession. The flurry over, the two men outwardly resumed their former attitude toward each other. Actually, the episode marked the end of Sutter's control over his post.

Frémont, who declared that Sutter would be severely punished if the prisoners there escaped, placed his assistant Kern in charge of them, and in Frémont's absence Kern now virtually commanded Sutter's Fort.[2] In short, the Captain had executed a double stroke: he had taken, not merely Sonoma, but also the stronghold of the redoubtable Swiss, and now had two good bases for controlling all northern California.

Events now moved rapidly. Some of the settlers who had taken Sonoma had ideas of their own as to how a revolt should be conducted. At such figures as William B. Ide, a shrewd, fussy, dogmatic Jack-of-all-trades, who had wandered west from Vermont, successively a farmer, school-teacher, carpenter, and rancher, or as Dr. Semple, an unbelievably long and lanky Kentuckian, who was quick on the trigger and loved an il-

[1] Bidwell, *Century Magazine*, Vol. 19, New Series, 520.
[2] Cf. Bidwell, *California in 1841–8*, 164–167; Revere, *Tour of Duty*, 74 ff.

literate kind of rhetoric, it is easy to sneer. Josiah Royce has sneered at these typical frontier figures in the best Boston-Brahmin manner. They were not drawing-room ornaments. They did not have the horror which a philosophical pacifist like Dr. Royce felt for the rude acts of warfare which have usually accompanied the American conquest of new territory. But they did organize carefully their little uprising, thus touched off by Frémont, give it an orderly form, and attempt in the best Jeffersonian manner to justify it.

Sonoma was held by the settlers as a combination of fort and headquarters, and the little garrison there rapidly increased from fifteen or eighteen to forty men. On the very first day, June 14, 1846, the captors redeemed themselves from the charge of being a loose mob of maurauders by declaring the "Republic of California." This scheme of an independent republic had been revolved by Americans for years. One recruit, William L. Todd, a nephew of Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, took a piece of whitish brown cloth a yard and a half in length, and with either some paint or some pokeberry juice (the accounts are conflicting) placed upon it a large star in the upper right-hand corner, and facing this at the top the figure of a grizzly bear. Native Californians gazing contemptuously at this design were heard later to call it "the shoat." [1] Across the middle of the flag were painted the words "California Repub-

[1] Bidwell, *Century Magazine*, Vol. 19, New Series, 521 ff.

THE BEAR FLAG AND BEAR GUIDON

(At the top is an illustration of the "Bear Guidon" belonging to Sonoma troop of the California Battalion. At the bottom is the original Bear Flag. Both passed into the possession of the San Francisco Society of California Pioneers, and these illustrations are taken from the California Blue Book for 1903.)

lic." When it was hoisted on the empty Mexican staff, the Bear Flag Party and the Bear Flag War had found an imperishable name. This flag was a symbol to which the settlers attached the utmost importance. It meant order. Only one unruly fellow dared to suggest that Sonoma be sacked, and "an unanimous indignant frown made him shrink from the presence of honest men." [1] It meant liberty; Dr. Semple was voluble in preaching the abstract principles of republicanism. It meant American rule forever replacing Mexican rule, as Ide formally asserted.

A proclamation written by Ide with the consent of the garrison was published on June 18, 1846, setting forth the principles of the revolt. It guaranteed peace and security to all parsons not found under arms. The purpose of the uprising, it stated, was to overthrow a selfish, incompetent government, which had confiscated property, and shamefully oppressed the laboring people of California by its enormous exactions on imported goods.[2]

Frémont unquestionably looked upon all this with immense pleasure. It suited his purposes precisely. He heard within a few days from Commander Montgomery of the *Portsmouth* at Sausalito, who was equally delighted; a "master stroke," said Montgomery, but it should have been "followed up by a rush upon Santa Clara, where Castro might have been taken by thirty

[1] Eyewitness, quoted by Bryant, *What I Saw in California*, 289.
[2] *The Californian*, Aug. 22, 1846.

men." [1] For their part, the Bear Flag leaders were now eager to draw Frémont from his nominal position of neutrality. The shrewd William Ide in especial thought that the explorer was playing a somewhat too Machiavellian game. His game, as Ide said, was to keep in the background and avoid military action as an American officer, but at the same time to egg on the American settlers in steps which would provoke Castro to some punitive measure, when Frémont could openly take a hand. The Captain could thereupon allege that his interference was necessary to save the Americans from brutal maltreatment, and that the revolt had advertised to the world the settlers' eagerness to be rescued from Mexican tyranny. Ide disliked what he calls this plan of "neutral conquest" as being timid, selfish, and unnecessary. He believed that Frémont should cut boldly through the mesh of Mexican bluster and threats, and should have used Castro's proclamation against the American squatters as a *causa belli*. Both the acts and entreaties of the Bear Flag fighters were now designed to draw Frémont into the open, and within a few days they succeeded.

The raising of the Bear Flag, the circulation of Ide's proclamation of the "Republic," and the news of the

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 334. Frémont was more than cautious in his correspondence with Montgomery. He wrote the latter that "the nature of my instructions [as an engineer and explorer] do not contemplate any active hostility on my part in the event of war between the two countries; and therefore, although I am resolved to *take* such *active* and precautionary measures as I shall judge necessary for our safety, I am not authorized to ask from you any other than such assistance as, without incurring yourself unusual responsibility, you would feel at liberty to afford me." Cf. Irving Berdine Richman, *California under Spain and Mexico*, 491, 492.

occupation of Sonoma aroused the immediate anger of the Mexican officials. Castro replied with two proclamations on June 17. He had no forces beyond San Francisco Bay, but he promptly collected what troops he could farther south, and dispatched them under an officer named De la Torre to the relief of Sonoma. Their approach became known on June 23; the Bear Flag forces sent couriers to ask Frémont's help, and marched out under Lieutenant Ford to repulse the Californians. The result was a brisk engagement about a dozen miles from San Rafael, in which the Bear Flag men killed two Californians, wounded several more, and put the whole body to helter-skelter flight. While this happened, Frémont was casting off all disguise and taking the field. He was glad to have the call to arms. He had made up his mind that the crisis had come, and that it was "unsafe to leave events to mature under unfriendly, or mistaken, direction." [1]

Frémont and his rescue party reached Sonoma on June 25, 1846, and with an augmented force of 160 men in all he at once took up the pursuit of De la Torre's retreating troops. The Captain had not acted without serious thought. He believed that his open entry into the struggle would prevent the Bear Flag settlers from being ultimately crushed by the stronger forces of Castro, and would deter any British agents from proclaiming a protectorate of California. If war had begun between the United States and Mexico, all would be well.

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 520.

On the other hand, if peace were maintained and it became necessary to disavow Frémont, little harm would have been done. The Captain took steps to make disavowal easy by drafting his resignation and laying it aside in an envelope to be sent to Senator Benton, who could transmit it to the War Department at his discretion.

It was only by great luck combined with an adroit ruse that De la Torre's crippled force escaped south of San Francisco Bay to a point of safety. The Californians had better horses than the Americans. De la Torre, having thus gained the head start, put a false message into the hands of an Indian, announcing an imminent attack upon Sonoma by Castro himself, and when the Indian was captured, Frémont hastily turned back from his pursuit to protect the threatened town; and De la Torre was then fortunate enough to find a large boat at Sausalito on the north shore of the Bay, and to make his way across. The anger and chagrin of the Americans at failing to crush their antagonists were extreme. They had as yet lost no men in open battle, but when Lieutenant Ford was marching to repulse De la Torre near San Rafael on the Bay, the settlers had come upon the bodies of two American immigrants, Tom Cowan, or Cowie, and a man named Fowler, murdered by the roadside.[1] It was plain that they had been tortured to death, and their disemboweled and mutilated corpses presented a shocking spectacle.

[1] Fowler, *MS. Narrative*, pp. 3, 4.

Cowan had been well-known and greatly liked, and the episode aroused a stern desire for revenge. A little later, when the Americans were in possession of San Rafael, some Californians landed from a boat, were intercepted by Kit Carson, who was on patrol duty, and when they offered resistance, were shot down.[1] This appears to have been a cold-blooded murder. In excuse, it has been said that they were messengers bearing official Mexican orders, and that they tried to escape; and a long controversy has raged over the question whether the killing of the two—some say three—was defensible. There is little doubt that it was not.

Meanwhile, Frémont, after finding Sonoma perfectly safe, had swept down again upon De la Torre's cold trail to Sausalito. He made camp here, and we have a good picture of him as a Yankee trader saw him at rest:[2]

> As yet I had not seen the captain, but my imagination had pictured him out somehow as I thought he ought to look. Of course a knowledge of his exploits and renown led me to suppose that I should see a full-whiskered military-looking man, towering in size above all his command, stiff with uniforms and straps, looking blood, bullets, and grizzly bears. But I saw nothing of the kind. After a survey of the different groups about the

[1] Among many conflicting narratives, the best is Alexander Godey's, *N. Y. Evening Post*, Oct. 30, 1856; cf. also Richman, *California under Spain and Mexico*, p. 313, which gives Jasper O'Farrell's story that Frémont ordered the execution.

[2] Narrative of William D. Phelps, *N. Y. Tribune*, Aug. 14, 1856.

camp, I could discover no one that bore resemblance to my picture, and going up to a tall, lank-looking specimen of a Kentuckian, dressed in a greasy deerskin shirt and trousers to match, and a coonskin cap on his head, with the tail in front, I asked if the captain was in the camp. The individual (the long doctor) replied in the affirmative, and pointed out to me as Capt. Frémont a slender and well-proportioned man, of sedate but pleasing countenance, sitting in front of a tent. His dress, as near as I remember, was a blue flannel shirt, after the naval style, open at the collar, which was turned over; over this a deerskin hunting shirt, figured and trimmed in hunter's style, blue cloth pantaloons and neat moccasins, all of which had very evidently seen hard service. His head was not cumbered by hat or cap of any shape, but a light cotton handkerchief, bound tightly round his head, surmounted a suit which might not appear very fashionable at the White House or be presentable at the Queen's levee; but to my eye it was an admirable rig to scud under or fight in.

A few minutes' conversation convinced me that I stood in the presence of the King of the Rocky Mountains. He said "his operations were against the military force of the country; that his government had been outrageously insulted in his person, and he would compel from Castro a public apology or hunt him from the country." Capt.

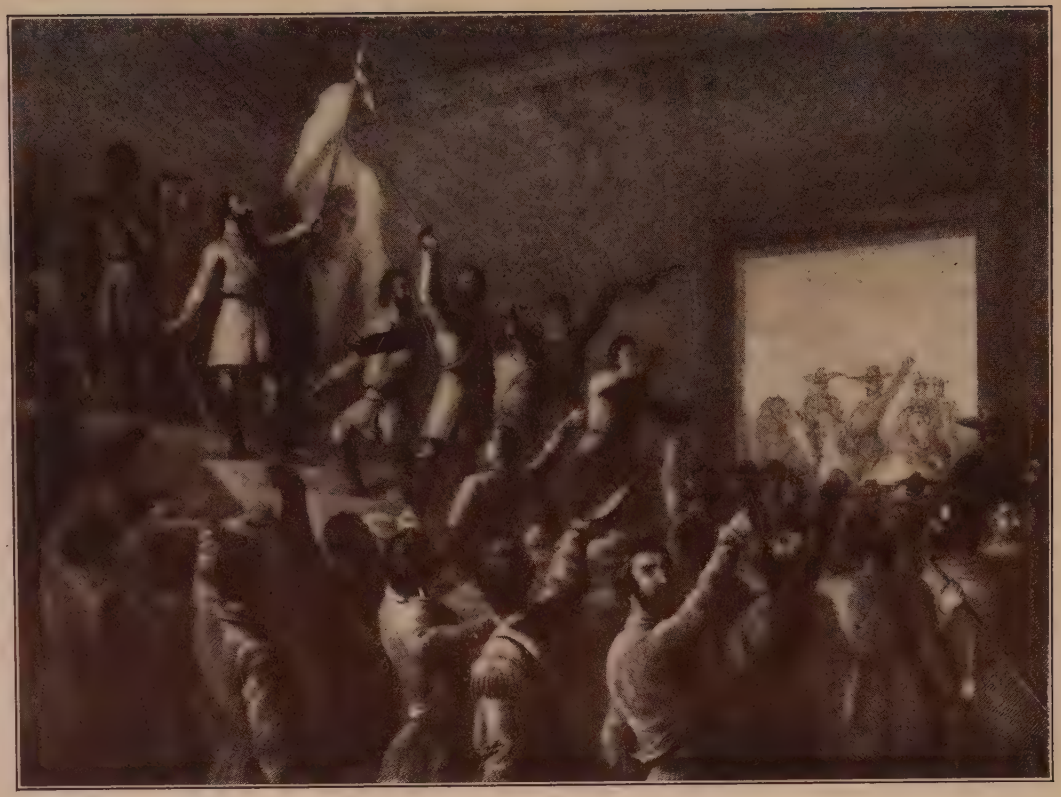
> Frémont now determined on spiking and disabling the guns of the fort on the opposite side of the passage, as this place, if garrisoned by the enemy, would much obstruct the passage of ships and consequently endanger the safety of supplies which might arrive by sea.

Frémont's designs, with the whole area north and west of San Francisco in his hands, were now of a most ambitious character. He meant to rally the settlers into an army sufficient to defeat Castro and capture Monterey and Santa Barbara. Arce's horses and those found at Sonoma had given him an adequate supply of mounts; at Sonoma he had taken guns and munitions which supplemented the powder, lead, and caps sent him by Captain Montgomery of the *Portsmouth*. Now, crossing San Francisco Bay to Fort Point, he seized the little post there, spiked its old Spanish brass guns, and captured some additional supplies. It may be mentioned in passing that amid all the preoccupations of war, Frémont's poetic vein cropped out for a moment when he bestowed upon the entrance of San Francisco Bay the name of the Golden Gate, an appellation that has become immortal. Settlers were flocking in to reinforce the American camps at both Sutter's Fort and Sonoma in steadily increasing numbers. The reports of the successes of Frémont, Merritt, and Ide; of the brutal murder of Cowan and Fowler; and of the proclamation of an independent government, had aroused much excite-

ment and enthusiasm. Native Californians of the region, threatened with severe punishment if they took up arms, were making haste to declare their peaceful intentions.[1] The road was open for a triumphant march southward.

From these new designs of Frémont was born the California Battalion, the little army which he was to use in his conquest. On July 4, 1846, he was back again in Sonoma, and participated in a celebration which included much firing of salutes, speeches, and a ball. During that day and the next, the settlers were organized with Frémont's men into the Battalion, comprising four companies of 234 men in all, grim and formidable-looking soldiers. Frémont took over the command from Ide, and, calling the men before him, made a brief address,[2] dwelling on their joint responsibilities, enjoining them to do nothing to discredit their cause, and promising energetic action until Castro was subdued. Ide replied in behalf of the settlers.[3] At once a new discipline was given to the force, Frémont bringing it under close control and requiring long hours of drill. Simultaneously, he sent out foraging parties, which requisitioned horses and drove in cattle to be butchered for food. For the nonce, this looked a good deal like robbery to the Californians, but the Government later paid them and reimbursed Sutter for the use of his Fort.

[1] Cf. Grigsby's letter, Senate Ex. Doc. No. 1, 29th Congress, 2nd session, 665.
[2] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 526; *Congressional Globe*, Aug. 9, 1856; *Fort Sutter Papers*, Vol. 5.
[3] *Niles's Register*, Vol. 173, p. 111.



FRÉMONT RAISING THE BEAR FLAG

(An imaginative painting by J. McNevin, published by Virtue and Company in New York; possessing no historical accuracy, it is interesting as a contribution to the Frémont legend.)

The California Battalion, with its motley array of voyageurs, trappers, scouts, former sailors, frontier farmers, and ranchmen, was a body unlike any other that has ever fought on American soil, and yet one with close affinities to our pioneer fighters in all generations. Miles Standish, Robert Rogers, Daniel Boone, or Davy Crockett would have recognized the breed at once. Most of the men wore broad-brimmed hats pulled low over the eyes, shirts of buckskin or blue flannel, and buckskin trousers and moccasins, all much the worse for wear and smeared with dirt, blood, and gunpowder. From a leather girdle about every man's waist hung an ugly-looking bowie or hunter's knife, and sometimes a brace of pistols. Most of the recruits were bearded and long-haired; they were all sunburnt and fierce of visage. A single, very sorry-looking bugle sounded the calls. Only one member of Frémont's original force, a tall, manly Illinoisan named Risdon Moore, had hung back, he feeling that these military operations against the peaceful Californians were unjustifiable; but Frémont had quickly converted him by clapping him for one night in a hot, ill-ventilated dungeon of Sutter's Fort which was swarming with fleas. The others were athirst for the fray. Gillespie, who had continued to be a close adviser of Frémont, was made a major of the Battalion, and the roster of members who then or a little later received officers' commissions—Owens, Ford, Swift, Sears, Grigsby, Hastings, Thompson,

Jacobs, McLean, Hensley, Gibson—shows how predominant was the Anglo-Saxon stock.

At this juncture, with the advance about to begin, came news which Frémont must for all his vein of rash daring have received with a sigh of relief; the news that war between the United States and Mexico had opened, and that powerful American warships were in California waters. His position was now regularized. Commodore Sloat of the Pacific squadron, anchored at Mazatlan, had received information on May 31 of the battles of Palo Alta and Resaca de la Palma. With inexcusable timidity, he had refused to act, though he held explicit instructions from Washington that the moment he received certain news of war he was to occupy San Francisco and such other California ports as he could reach. Sailing north after more than a week's delay, on July 2 he was in Monterey, with the town under his guns. Here, he still hesitated, and in fact even made the usual call of courtesy on the authorities.[1] But learning of Frémont's operations, and deciding also that there was danger that Sir George Seymour of the British fleet on the coast might raise the British flag, he took belated action. On July 7, he demanded the surrender of the town, and landed two hundred and fifty sailors and marines to hoist the American colors. Immediately thereafter, he sent orders to the *Portsmouth* in San Francisco Bay to seize the town of Yerba Buena or San Francisco, and dispatched a

[1] Smith, *War with Mexico*, I, 334.

courier to Frémont informing him of all that had occurred.

The Bear Flag War was now over, and the Mexican-American conflict in California had taken its place. Frémont, receiving the news that Sloat's flag was flying over Monterey on or soon after July 10, set out at once from Sutter's Fort with one hundred and sixty picked men for that town. He was able to feel that events had justified him. He had played his cards one after the other in the firm belief, shared by Gillespie, that the renewed rupture of American and Mexican relations was a prelude to certain war. He had so played these cards that when the vacillating Sloat came upon the scene all California beyond San Francisco Bay was in American hands and a large and well-equipped land force was ready to co-operate with the Navy.

Had Frémont foreseen how harshly a group of later historians would criticize his daring series of acts in turning back from his explorations, fomenting the Bear Flag uprising, and finally assuming its open leadership, he would have been dismayed and incredulous. Without partiality for Frémont, it is impossible to believe that this criticism, in the extreme terms in which Royce and Hittell state it, is justified. Frémont is accused of acting without specific authority, and of course that charge is true. He was six months' travel by a dangerous and difficult route from Washington; through Gillespie he had received news which made him feel it was his duty to assume a certain independent

responsibility. He did just what a long line of officers of the English-speaking race have always done in emergencies. The British Empire owes half its territory to subalterns, generals, ship captains, and merchants who have acted without authority and been applauded later. Andrew Jackson had no authority in 1818 to invade the Spanish territory of Florida and seize Pensacola, but he did it. Commodore T. A. C. Jones had had no authority in 1842 for the occupation of Monterery, but he occupied it. An officer who will not go beyond out-of-date and insufficient orders in an emergency, who will not use his own discretion, is not worth his salt. Admiral Sloat was just such an officer, and the Administration in Washington regarded Sloat's timidity and vacillation on the Pacific Coast as a national misfortune, and made that fact clear to him.

Frémont has been accused, again, of taking action which, orders or no orders, was not justified by the facts of the California situation, or his knowledge of the general wishes of the Federal Government. But it is useless to deny that he had left Washington with verbal instructions from the Administration; besides his own word, we have that of Senator Benton, Mrs. Frémont, and Secretary Bancroft for the fact, and they all had a high regard for the truth. It is useless to deny that the fear of an Indian attack was general; Sutter himself feared it. It cannot be denied, finally, that Castro was acting in a way which filled the American settlers with apprehension for their property and personal

safety—his own orders and proclamations prove that—or that Frémont had good reason for fearing a sudden British proclamation of some form of protectorate. Royce is especially caustic in his treatment of the panic of the Bear Flag leaders regarding Castro. But of this one of our ablest historians writes:[1]

> First, many of the settlers had ample reasons to feel alarmed: the illegality of their presence; Castro's sudden and cruel seizure of Americans in 1840; his attack upon Frémont in violation (the Americans believed) of a promise; official notices, issued about May 1, to the effect that a majority of the Americans were liable to be expelled at the convenience of the authorities; Castro's warlike preparations; his talk of moving against the immigrants with armed forces; and reports, more or less authentic, and reliable, from various persons regarding what he said or intended. Secondly, the contemporary testimony of Frémont, Gillespie, and other Americans—some of it given under oath—that alarm was actually felt is too strong to be rejected. Much has been made [by Royce] of Bidwell, a clerk of Sutter's, who tells us that alarm was not felt. But (1) his statement was made thirty years after the events; (2) he admits that he was not on good terms with Frémont, and his statement aims to show that Frémont invented the story

[1] Smith, *War with Mexico*, I, 529.

of alarm as an excuse for his conduct; (3) his statement is in other respects clearly inaccurate; (4) it assumes that he knew the sentiment of all the persons on the Sacramento, yet proves that an important fact may have been known to but few; (5) it shows that at the critical time he was absent in the mountains; (6) it says, "Californians were always talking of expelling Americans," and therefore were talking of it in April, 1846; (7) his book mentions that in 1845 an attack upon New Helvetia was so confidently expected that he rode night and day to warn Sutter....

Almost equally violent is Royce's attack upon the "legend" that the British had designs upon California; but the British archives show that these designs were well matured. The apprehension that England would forestall us was dwelt upon in the Senate early in 1846; it filled Secretary Bancroft's mind. "The expansive course of Great Britain," says the historian just quoted,[1] "remarks dropped by English writers, repeated warnings dropped from our diplomatic and consular agents at Mexico, and the consensus of opinion in California, Mexico, France, and the United States were quite enough to warrant suspicions of England." Sloat, Stockton, and Larkin all feared Rear Admiral Sir George Seymour's intentions. British policy since 1815 has usually been extremely considerate of American

[1] Smith, *War with Mexico*, I, 324; cf. T. G. Cary, *Conquest of Alta California* (MS.; Boston Athenaeum), p. 34; *London Times*, Sept. 28, 1846.

susceptibilities, and it was so in this instance. But the English naval contingent on the Pacific coast would have been glad to secure a diplomatic foothold if it could be done without antagonizing the Americans. This was perceived with growing clarity in Washington. Frémont's activities along the coast, and his return at a critical juncture from the north, accentuated the feeling of the British officers that the United States was determined to obtain California, and that it would be impossible to act without coming into sharp collision with American aims and agents.

Above all, Frémont has been assailed as a mischief maker who spilt innocent blood, aroused a resentment among the native Californians which quadrupled the difficulties of the subsequent American occupation, and laid the foundations for a lasting animosity between these Californians and the Americans. Actually, the Bear Flag uprising did not cost a dozen lives all told. A more nearly bloodless conquest or revolution it would be hard to find. In weighing Josiah Royce's denunciation of it, we must recall that Royce was a thoroughgoing pacifist to whom any fighting of any character was abhorrent. An armed clash, in view of the outbreak of the Mexican War, was inevitable, and northern California could not have been secured with a shorter casualty list. As for the ill-feeling aroused by the Bear Flag uprising, much of it appears quickly to have evaporated. The Americans, after Frémont took full control, bore themselves for the most part in an exem-

plary manner. There were no outrages, no depredations, and few aberrations from the rule of strict obedience and orderliness; Alexander Godey tells us,[1] truthfully, that Frémont's operations "were eminently characterized by a regard for the rights and interests of the inhabitants of the country through which his forces marched, which secured to him the kindest feelings of regard and respect of the entire California population." It is true that there was a sudden angry flare-up of the Californians against the Americans after Sloat raised his flag, and much semi-guerrilla warfare. But where did it occur? Not in northern California, where Frémont had acted, but in southern California. As for the legacy of ill feeling which the events of 1846 left, that was largely inevitable. Any historian who supposes that two races so alien in blood, religion, habits, temper, and aims as the Americans and the Mexican-Californians could have lived together without sharp friction is very naïve.

Frémont was not the liberator of California. It would in all probability have fallen safely and surely into American hands had he gone unambitiously north to the Oregon Trail in the spring of 1846. But he did play a gallant, daring, and useful rôle in expediting the American conquest, making it easy for the Navy to act, preventing the possible occurrence of complications with Great Britain, and enabling California to be almost wholly pacified before the first overland forces under General Kearny arrived.

[1] *N. Y. Evening Post*, Oct. 30, 1856.

## CHAPTER XX

# THE MARCHES OF THE CALIFORNIA BATTALION

On July 19, 1846, the approach of Frémont's California Battalion to Monterey was heralded by a heavy cloud of dust under the burning sun, from which emerged the men in a long and wild-looking file. Frémont rode first, a thin, wiry, energetic young man, with flowing hair, a bearded, sun-bronzed face, and eyes that seemed to burn with a consuming fire—"such eyes," wrote a British naval officer. He was dressed much as the Yankee skipper had seen him at Sausalito, in buckskin trousers, blouse, and moccasins, a blue shirt thrown open at the neck, and a cotton handkerchief tied around his brow. Behind him came five swarthy Delaware Indians who served as his bodyguard. After them, on sturdy ponies, rode the men, two and two, their long, heavy rifles thrown across their saddle pommels. With heavy knives slung at their hips, with the sun glinting on their polished arms, and with their gaunt, steel-muscled, determined look, they seemed a force which few would care to meet. The women looked timidly at them through the grated windows. They camped that night just outside the town, among the firs and pines

near the sea, and their watch fires threw a quivering light into the forest glades and along the waves.[1]

Frémont, as usual, had an eye to the beauty of his camp. "Before us, to the right, was the town of Monterey, with its red-tiled roofs and large gardens enclosed by high adobe walls, capped with red tiles; to the left, the view was over the ships in the bay and on over the ocean, where the July sun made the sea-breeze and the shade of the pine-trees grateful."[2] In the harbor rode, not merely Sloat's flagship, the *Savannah,* but also the British flagship *Collingwood* of eighty guns under Admiral Seymour. Seymour, so the report ran, had said, when he arrived three days earlier: "Sloat, if your flag was not flying on shore, I should have hoisted mine there."

During these July days the fate of California lay primarily in the hands of three Americans. One was Sloat himself, wavering, indecisive, and timid, who learned with alarm that Frémont had been acting without written orders from Washington, and who took himself off the scene at the earliest pretext. The second was Larkin, consul at Monterey, a canny, cool-headed, kind-hearted Yankee, rather uneducated but with twelve years' experience of the country, and distinguished by his desire to serve the native Californians as well as the United States. The third was, of course, the impetuous Frémont.

[1] Walter Colton, *Deck and Port;* Lieutenant Fred Walpole, R. N., *Four Years in the Pacific.*

[2] Frémont, *Memoirs,* 534.

MONTEREY HARBOR IN 1846

(Painted for Frémont's Memoirs. Chicago. 1887. The vessel at the left is the British warship *Collingwood* under Admiral Seymour; the two vessels at the right are American warships under Commodore Stockton.)

American history was being made rapidly in those days. Zachary Taylor, having driven the Mexicans across the Rio Grande, was advancing from Matamoras into the northern part of the Republic. General Kearny was concentrating an army at Bent's Fort to invade New Mexico and California. On June 15, 1846, Secretary Buchanan and the British minister had signed at Washington the treaty partitioning Oregon at the 49th parallel, and thus adding to our country the territory of three states, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. The great Mormon invasion of the West, 16,000 strong, had crossed the Mississippi, and its advance guard, using Frémont's early reports as guide, was at Council Bluffs on the Missouri preparing for the passage of the plains. A new and greater flood of emigration was embarking on the California and Oregon trail. Among the California trains was the company of J. T. Reed and the Donners, destined the ensuing winter to be caught in the Sierras by heavy blizzards, and to furnish the Far West with one of its most horrible tragedies; among them was also Edwin Bryant, who was to become alcalde of San Francisco and to write a book from which we have already quoted.[1] In New England, the War was unpopular; in the West, it had been received with enthusiasm, 50,000 volunteers had flocked to the colors, and U. S. Grant and Robert E. Lee were about to win their first laurels. Everywhere, in East and West alike, the country's eyes were fixed

[1] Sabin, *Kit Carson Days*, 264.

upon the Rio Grande, the Santa Fé objective of Kearny, and far-off California.

Commodore Sloat, worried lest he had exceeded his authority in seizing Monterey, worried over the problem of carrying out his orders to conciliate the Californians when Frémont was already in arms against them, soon found a way of escape. He sailed away from the coast, leaving the command to his ambitious, smart, and rather headstrong second, Commodore R. F. Stockton. This officer had Frémont's energy, together with a flamboyancy all his own; and, like Frémont, he believed in handling the Californians with a firm hand. Between the new Commodore and the Captain there sprang up a warm and enduring friendship. They were much together, and the result was the issuance over Stockton's name of a rather bombastic proclamation, abusing Castro violently, and declaring that the Americans were acting merely to preserve life and property. At the same time, they planned an energetic land offensive, which should either take Castro prisoner or drive him into Mexico.

Their scheme of operations for this purpose was simple. Castro was now at Los Angeles, with about five hundred men and seven or eight pieces of artillery, a little army that was slowly increasing. Frémont's Battalion was taken into the naval service; he was made major in command, with Gillespie as captain, and eighty marines were added to it to furnish strength. This force, numbering about two hundred and twenty hardy

fighters, was taken by sea in the sloop *Cyane* to San Diego, and landed there to cut off Castro from the rear. Much to their surprise, Frémont's Battalion were received with great cordiality by the chief inhabitants, and given every aid in levying on the country for horses and supplies.

In fact, for a week or so, Frémont and his men enjoyed a beguiling mixture of picnicking and foraging in the beautiful countryside about San Diego. Irrigation was practiced here, and again and again they came upon a ranch that was a veritable Garden of Eden, blooming with vivid flowers and crowded with pear trees, peach trees, olive trees, fig trees, and vines on which the grapes were already purple. The days were bright and hot, the skies a dome of cloudless light, and the nights cool and star-spangled. Forty years later Frémont remembered the most enchanting of these excursions. The noonday heat forced a halt in a pretty garden near a farmhouse. Here the water from a little stream flowed into a basin some fifteen feet across, kept clear and pure by a cement coping. Pomegranates and other fruit trees hung over the water, and under these they sat as they roasted a portion of lamb on skewers at a fire, and ate it with bread, fruit, and wine. At the end of the week, they took up their 140-mile march for Los Angeles, still through a country whose luxuriant fertility, with the golden wheat in shock, impressed Frémont.

Their victory was won more easily than Frémont,

who had learned that Castro was entrenched upon a mesa in front of the town, expected. Beyond San Pedro, he joined Commodore Stockton with a force of 360 men and several pieces of artillery. No hostile figures were seen except a few scattered horsemen who vanished on the horizon. On the afternoon of August 13, 1846, the little American army entered Los Angeles unopposed, and with a brass band in front marched through streets lined with curious and not unfriendly people, more like "a parade of home guards than an enemy taking possession of a conquered town." [1] Castro's force, frightened by the American advance, had buried part of its guns and scattered to the four winds, Castro himself being reported hidden in the mountains overlooking the San Gabriel plain.

The results of this occupation of the official capital of California, and of a series of proclamations which Stockton in his usual histrionic fashion immediately issued, were at first gratifying. Stockton declared that while California was now a possession of the United States, under martial law, the people would be unmolested in their ordinary business, would be considered citizens of the territory, and in due time would be given a regular governor, secretary, and legislative council. A reign of justice and amity seemed to begin. Many prominent native Californians surrendered, and were released on parole. Sentiment rallied to the American side as manifestly certain of victory. The first Cali-

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 566, 567.

fornia newspaper, of course in English, appeared—the *Californian,* established at Monterey, on August 15, 1846; the first public school was opened. In September, some successful municipal elections were held. Chaplain Colton was appointed alcalde of Monterey, and his administration proved immediately popular. The Mexican inhabitants were delighted when a large number of horses, driven off by the Indians, were restored to them, while Stockton evinced a gratifying tact in settling some civil disputes brought before him. His intention was, after creating a legislative council, to make himself governor, but he did not wish to hold that office long. He was revolving an absurd dream of a spectacular attempt upon Mexico City from the west, landing his troops at Acapulco and marching them overland.

Frémont was sent northward by Stockton to his old positions in the Sacramento Valley, with instructions to muster as large a force as he could, and with the promise that as soon as Stockton began the invasion of Mexico, he would be made Governor of California. Meanwhile, California was divided into three military districts, of which Stockton took charge of the one in the middle, Frémont the one at the north, and Gillespie the one at the south. Frémont's task was especially easy. Surrounded by his friends and associates of the Bear Flag War, fearing no enemies, for the native Californians were cut off from Mexico and were overawed by the large population of American settlers,

he could begin recruiting his California Battalion to full strength without worries. But Gillespie's task was very difficult. Southern California was closely in touch with Mexico, the native Californians were restless and numerous, and there were few Americans there and few residents who sympathized with American aims. His force was pitifully small, for despite Larkin's warnings, Stockton could supply him with only about fifty volunteers. When Gillespie's rigid military rule aroused discontent, such a corporal's guard was merely a temptation to an outbreak.

While Frémont was busiest recruiting his forces, the inevitable flare-up set southern California in sudden flame. There was an attack on the Los Angeles garrison on the night of September 22, 1846; four hundred Californians were shortly in arms; and when they cut off an American detachment of twenty-five men at the Chino farm near the town, the movement gained powerful headway. Gillespie was overborne with a rush. Having no fortifications and few arms, he was compelled, on September 29, to surrender Los Angeles on favorable terms, being allowed to embark his troops upon a merchant ship at San Pedro. When a few days later Stockton, who was at San Francisco, heard of this, he was filled with anger and mortification, and forthwith dispatched a strong force against the rebels.

With the guerrilla fighting at the south, the marching and countermarching of petty forces which occupied the period from October 1 to December 15, 1846,

we have nothing to do. It is sufficient to say that, in these seventy-five days, Stockton's operations against Los Angeles accomplished nothing, and that early in October, Captain William Mervine, moving against the town, was thrown back in disorder with somewhat serious losses.

Meanwhile, Frémont was acting with a degree of caution highly unusual and on the whole justified by the disastrous consequences of Stockton's more precipitate moves. In October, he did indeed make a brief gesture toward intervening in the conflict. Receiving orders from Stockton to hasten south from the Sacramento, he proceeded as far as Santa Barbara with some one hundred and seventy well-armed men. Here he learned of Mervine's defeat and was informed that the enemy had denuded the country of horses and cattle, so that he would be left without transportation or meat. He concluded that further preparations were necessary, and using, as he wrote Stockton,[1] "the discretionary authority you have given me," returned to the vicinity of Monterey. Stockton condemned his return in vigorous terms, and censured Frémont in letters to the Secretary of the Navy, a fact which later excited the indignation of the explorer. "I have sometimes wondered," he wrote, "if it never occurred to Stockton that the same difficulties which blocked his march upon Los Angeles were also in the way of my command, which was expected to operate as a mounted force in the interior."

[1] Frémont, *Memoirs*, 580.

Certain that he was taking the right course, he continued, with headquarters first in Monterey and later in San Juan, his work of finding good mounts and laying in a store of beeves and other supplies. Shortly, he had at his back 430 "splendid fighters," Kern at Sutter's Fort having been ordered to send him at once every available recruit.[1]

When, at the end of November, Frémont and this laboriously collected army moved out from San Juan, they advanced by way of the San Benito River and Salinas Valley toward San Luis Obispo. It was an inclement season. The weather was chilly, and for whole days the men had to struggle forward through a frigid drizzle; the roads and trails were fetlock-deep in mud; the horses found little pasturage and became so weak for want of nourishment that many fell out by the way. The provisions consisted of some necessary foodstuffs, carried on pack mules, and a herd of cattle, which as fast as they were slaughtered were replaced by other beeves picked up, sometimes one hundred at a time, from ranches along the way. Edwin Bryant, who was with the Battalion, tells us that thirteen or fourteen cattle of large size were slaughtered every afternoon, and that it was amazing how much beef the men ate. The average ration seemed to him ten pounds a day, and some consumed much more, rising at two o'clock in the morning to roast fresh slabs of juicy, tender steak.

[1] *Fort Sutter Papers*, Vol. 20.

MONTEREY IN 1846

(As Frémont and Stockton occupied it in 1846. From J. W. Revere's "A Tour of Duty in California.")

Yet the health of the men continued remarkably good.[1]

At San Luis Obispo, Frémont was lucky enough to capture Don Jesús Pico, a man of influence whom he made his lasting friend by pardoning him, amid the weeping entreaties of his wife, at the moment he was about to be executed for breaking his parole. Then the march was resumed under continued hardships from wind, cold, and rain. With excessive precaution, Frémont took a mountain path to avoid the danger of an insurgent ambush along the road. Christmas day found the little army on a high ridge behind Santa Barbara breasting a bitter southeasterly storm, which swept with torrents of water the precipitous slope they must descend. Undaunted, they set forward, drawing their hats over their eyes, and holloaing to their beasts. They had better have waited. The wind continued blowing like a tornado, the water falling in sheets, until two o'clock that night. The trail was obliterated and the pack animals, stiffened by the cold and blinded by the rain, constantly lost their footing. Many fell into the ravines, where the water swept over them and drowned them; others slipped over the steep precipice which lay at one side. Before the descent was ended more than a hundred horses were lost. The advance guard did not reach the foot of the mountain and find a camping ground till impenetrable darkness had shut down. Then the men dropped exhausted in a sea of mud, and those who tried to light camp fires found them almost imme-

[1] Bryant, *What I Saw in California*, 365 ff.

diately extinguished. Some, left on the mountain side, crept under shelving rocks and stayed there all night.[1]

After a week's rest at Santa Barbara, the march was resumed, the Battalion now keeping near the shore of the ocean. At times their path was so close that the surf washed their feet, and they could see scores of grampus whales spouting in the offing. On January 5, 1847, in warm, springlike weather, they reached San Buenaventura, and entered a fertile ranching country where provisions were easy to obtain. Six days later, on January 11, the advance party met two Californians riding bareheaded and in great haste. They brought Frémont news that the California insurgents had met an American army jointly commanded by Kearny and Stockton, and had been defeated after hard fighting, the American soldiers then—on the previous day—marching into Los Angeles.

The situation had in fact changed with amazing rapidity. General Stephen W. Kearny had led his Army of the West, comprising some two thousand men, to Santa Fé, had taken possession of that town soon after the middle of August, 1846, and had spent about a month reducing the country to order. He had then set out, on September 25, with an expeditionary force of three hundred dragoons for California. On the way, he met Kit Carson, hurrying east with official dispatches from Stockton and private letters from Frémont, and there ensued an historic interview. Carson told Kearny

[1] See Bryant, *What I Saw in California*, 373 ff., for a vivid account.

that the conquest of California was virtually completed. The General thereupon decided to send back all but one hundred of his dragoons, and ordered Carson to turn about and serve as guide for his diminished party. Naturally, Carson protested; he had pledged himself to Commodore Stockton, he said, to go to Washington; moreover, he had already covered eight hundred of the nine hundred and fifty miles from Los Angeles to Santa Fé, and was eager to see his family, from whom he had been so long parted. But Kearny insisted, Carson reluctantly acquiesced, and the dispatches were sent on by another hand.

With his hundred dragoons and two mountain howitzers, Kearny reached the frontier of California at the beginning of December, 1846, and at once learned that an insurrection was raging. On December 6, he came in contact with the enemy at San Pascual, some forty miles from San Diego, and in a sharp skirmish was decidedly worsted. Eighteen of the Americans were killed by a furious charge of the insurgents, Kearny and fourteen others were wounded, and the American force seemed for a time in danger of being wiped out. However, the Californians failed to follow up their advantage, and Kearny's troops, reduced to rations of mule meat and badly frightened, limped into San Diego.[1]

At San Diego, Kearny joined hands with Commodore Stockton; the General with less than eighty ef-

[1] Smith, *War with Mexico*, 342.

fective men, and the Commodore with more than four hundred sailors, marines, and California volunteers. When the two set out on December 29, 1846, for the march upon Los Angeles, Stockton with generous courtesy offered the chief command of the army to Kearny. Kearny declined, but later asked for and received the appointment of vice-commander or executive officer under Stockton. The Commodore made it clear to the men that he was commander-in-chief and governor of California, a fact which subsequent events made of great importance. Just outside of Los Angeles occurred the decisive battle with the insurgents, on January 8 and 9, 1847, the Americans easily winning with the loss of only one man killed, and throwing the Californians back to the site of the present city of Pasadena. The next day the troops marched into Los Angeles, and Gillespie, who was with them, had the satisfaction of seeing the American flag go up over the government house, this time to stay. Kearny and Stockton at once took up their headquarters in the town.

There was still some danger of sporadic fighting by the Californians, but Frémont now proved the instrument to avert it. Camping on the afternoon of the 12th near the mission of San Fernando, he received a messenger from the Commander of the Californians, Don Andreas Pico, who intimated that the insurgents were ready to surrender. It would seem that Frémont, who knew that Stockton was at hand and had just defeated the Californian army, should have left his su-

perior to arrange the terms of capitulation. He might have been severely censured by Stockton for arrogating the authority to make a treaty of peace, but it does not appear that the Commodore ever protested. The terms granted in this capitulation of Couenga were exceedingly generous. Frémont guaranteed to the insurgents protection in person and property, equal rights with the Americans in the territory, exemption from armed service or from any oath of allegiance during the War, and liberty to leave the country at will; he required only that they lay down their arms, disperse to their homes, and promise to assist in restoring tranquillity and submissiveness among the people. In short, he virtually allowed men who were defeated, hopelessly at bay, and subject to execution for breaking their parole, to dictate the terms of surrender. It was a characteristically hasty, hot-headed action, and there is evidence that Frémont would not have taken it had he not believed the Californians much stronger and bolder than they were.[1]

Yet the terms thus precipitately granted were, on the whole, exceedingly wise; they did much to conciliate the Californians and to secure their friendship for American rule.

[1] See story by Don Romulo Pico, *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 3, 1914.

## CHAPTER XXI

## A LETTER FROM JESSIE

JUST before leaving his camp at San Juan, Frémont had received through Larkin at Monterey a letter from Jessie. It offers at once a good summary of what had happened in the Benton household during his absence, and an appealing glimpse of the whole-souled devotion of the writer. The date was Washington, June 18, 1846.[1]

My Dearest Husband:—

A Mr. Magoffin says he will be at Bent's Fort a month from tomorrow, and that he will leave a letter for you, so I write, dearest husband, to tell you how happy I have been made by hearing of you up to the 31st of March, through Mr. O'Larkin. Only the day before, I had received the Mexican account of your being besieged by Gen. Castro, and I was much relieved by what Mr. O'Larkin says—that you could present yourself in Monterey, alone, if you wished, and not be harmed. But I hope that as I write you are rapidly nearing home, and that early in September there will be an end to our anxieties. In your dear letter you tell me that *le bon temps viendra,* and my faith in you is

[1] *Frémont MSS.*

such that I believe it will come: and it will come to all you love, for during your long absence God has been good to us and kept in health your mother and all you love best. This opportunity of writing only presented itself last night, so that there is not time for a letter from your mother herself, but I had one from her two days ago in which she tells me that during the warm weather she will remain at a place about ten miles from the city called Mount Pleasant. Her stay in the country did her health much good last fall and indeed it has been good generally throughout the winter. Her heart has been made glad by your brilliant success, and your late promotion, although it distressed her to anticipate more separations, could not but be most gratifying in many respects. You must let me make you my heartiest congratulations. I am sorry that I could not be the first to call you Colonel. It will please you the more as it was entirely a free will offering of the President's, neither father nor I nor anyone for us having asked or said we would like it.

So your merit has advanced you in eight years from an unknown second lieutenant, to the most talked of and admired lieutenant-colonel in the army. Almost all of the old officers called to congratulate me upon it, the Aberts among them, and I have heard of no envy except from some of the lower order of Whig papers who only see you as

Colonel Benton's son-in-law. As for your Report, its popularity astonished even me, your most confirmed and oldest worshipper. Lilly has it read to her (the stories, of course) as a reward for good behavior. She asked Preuss the other day if it was true that he caught ants on his hand and eat them—he was so much amazed that he could not answer her, and she said, "I read it in papa's lepote; it was when you were lost in California." Father absolutely idolizes Lilly; she is so good and intelligent that I do not wonder at it. And then you should see his pride in you!

Mother's health has been worse than ever during the winter, but the force of the disease seems now to have expended itself, and she is quite well again. That gave me a reason for staying at home quietly as I wished, and I have read so much that is improving that you will be very pleased with me. Your mother was kind enough to send me your daguerrotype, and it hangs over the head of my bed and is my guardian angel, for I could not waste time or do anything you did not like with that beloved face looking so kindly and earnestly at me. I opened a new history of Louisiana, a week or two ago, and it commenced with the Spanish discoveries on the southern part of the continent. I was by myself, Lilly asleep, and reading by *our* lamp. When I came to De Soto's search for the fountain of youth, I stopped, for it seemed as if pleasant

old days had returned; and then I remembered so well what you once wrote to me that I could not help bursting into tears. Do you remember, darling?

It was soon after we were married, and you wrote me, "Fear not for our happiness; if the hope for it is not something wilder than the Spaniards' search for the fountain in Florida, we will find it yet." I remembered it word for word, although it was so long since I read it. Dear, dear husband, you do not know how proud and grateful I am that you love me. We have found the fountain of perpetual youth for love, and I believe there are few others who can say so. I try very hard to be worthy of your love.

I had meant to tell you of many things which might interest, but it would take a day to choose out from the year's accumulation. The road you have discovered is spoken of as giving you more distinction than anything you have yet done. I had to publish almost all your letter, and like everything you write it has been reprinted all over the country. I have some beautiful poetry to show you on our motto *le bon temps viendra.* Editors have written to me for your biography and likeness, but I had no orders from you and then you know it would look odd to leave out your age, and you never told me how old you were yet.

How old are you? You might tell me now I am a colonel's wife—won't you, old papa? Poor papa, it made tears come to find you had begun to turn gray. You must have suffered much and been very anxious, "but all that must pass." I am very sorry you did not get our letters.[1] Yours gave so much happiness that I grieved you could not have had as much from ours. You will of course come on here as soon as you get back. I wanted to go to St. Louis to meet you, but father says I had better not, as it will be very uncomfortable and even dangerous to go out in the worst of the season, and I don't want to be sick, for I am not going to let you write anything but your name when you get home. And then we will probably have to be at Jefferson Barracks during the winter and until the new regiment is ready for the field. Father says you are to accept the appointment as it was given, with the understanding that you were to be kept on scientific duty under the direction of the Senate. Mr. Webster says it would be too great a loss to the science of the country if you were stopped in your onward course. If I begin telling you the sincere compliments from people whose names are known in Europe as well as America I would need a day.

You must have a few to think of, however, Edward Everett, Mr. Gallatin, Stevens (Central

[1] That is, up to January 24, 1846.

America), Davis, the author of "Jack Downing," a Dr. Barratt of Connecticut, a botanist who sent me his herbarium of American grasses (for which he wants the buffalo and bunch grasses) are among the Northern men. The South Carolinans claim you bodily, and Dr. Grayson of Charleston wrote one of the most beautiful of all the notices I saw. Your early and steady friends, Mr. McCrady and Mr. Poinsett, were the first to whom I sent well-bound copies of your book. You are ranked with De Foe. They say that as "Robinson Crusoe" is the most natural and interesting fiction of travel, so Frémont's report is the most romantically truthful. I have a letter from the President of the Royal Geographical Society, Lord Chichester, who says he could not help preparing a paper on your travels to be read at their meeting—and more and more and many more of the same.

Mr. Magoffin has come for the letter and I must stop. I have not had so much pleasure in a very great while as today. The thought that you may hear from me and know that all are well and that I can tell you again how dearly I love you makes me as happy as I can be while you are away.

All Jacob's relations [the negro servant Jacob Dodson] are well. I see Mrs. Talbot and her daughter constantly. They are so grateful to you for your mention of Theodore.

Farewell, dear, dear husband. In a few months

we shall not know what sorrow means. At least, I humbly hope and pray so.

Your own affectionate and devoted wife,

Jessie B. Frémont.

So Frémont was now a lieutenant-colonel, and his report had carried his fame throughout the country; Daniel Webster and Lord Chichester had praised him, and the President himself was interested in his promotion. These were facts which decidedly increased his self-confidence.

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